

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2022

I suppose half the world today is yearning for a Saviour, as humankind stumbles on through the mass of miseries that engorges us one and all.

For most folk in the civilised globe, it seems to me, these weeks around the beginning of Spring 2022 have been one long disorientating moger, and all that is most miserable about the human condition seems to have entangled all our lives as the winter ends.

The weather has not helped either, for that matter, with storms and floods all over the place – schools closed, electric power failed, trains and flights cancelled. Nature itself seems to have had enough of us – and has told us so, even though the worst of the Covid Pandemic seems to be over.

Worst of all though, has been the way that one evil dictator has invaded a sovereign country to ‘rescue’ those Ukrainian people he perceives as Russians. Eight years ago, he annexed Crimea in a similar move, ending post war European stability. It is not, it seems to me, coincidental that the country he has invaded happens to be on a path to the Balkans, a country that Vladimir Putin has long wanted to re-join Russia. Reclaiming the Soviet Union is not a new dream of his; we cannot remain blind to Putin’s ultimate plan to rule the entire world.

Do you remember the ambition of another despot left to his own devices? Consuming Poland in 1939, no one took a stand against Adolf Hitler, thinking of him as an insignificant petty madman on the world stage.

Then his troops went on to invade Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and France in the Spring of 1940; Yugoslavia and Greece in 1941. In less than two short years, the Fuhrer changed the face of Europe. Then there was no stopping him and we ended up with the nightmare that was World War II.

Putin, with the might of his 195,000 troops surrounding and entering Ukraine, has vowed not to stop until the country topples. And how awful it has been to watch on our TV screens these past nights, the hundreds of thousands of people fleeing for safety; the bewildered faces of innocent children; those in cities and towns throughout the country hiding in underground shelters as they listen to the missiles and bombs blasting all around.

And only the other day, Putin has compounded this with a threat that his nuclear arsenal is at the ready as he watches the sanctions, imposed by Europe, the USA and Japan, strangle the Russian economy. It is very obvious that Putin cares not a jot about the Russian people – they are the ones who will suffer too, and because he controls the media, many of them don't even know what is going on. Such is his umbrage about the way the conflict is going, that he has turned off all State media.

We must all support President Zelenksy and the people of Ukraine who have vowed never to surrender to Russia. Indeed, the Ukrainians are showing much more resistance that Putin anticipated. Ordinary citizens are taking up arms even though they have never fired a gun before – they will do so to retain their freedom and to protect their country.

Even in Russia itself, thousands of people have taken to the streets to protest about this war. Many of them have been arrested and detained in 54 Russian cities.

It has indeed become a David and Goliath conflict.

If ever there was a time to put Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan into practice on a global scale, it is now.

Here in the UK, as fuel and gas prices rise because of the conflict, we are to keep a look out for neighbours and elderly folk who may be struggling because of the hike in the cost of living.

And as far as those who are hundreds of miles away from our shores, we are indeed their keepers too – we can support the refugees fleeing through organisations like the International Rescue Committee and the United Nations Refugee Agency.

There are other bodies providing practical support for those still residing in Ukraine.

At the present moment, Save The Children is providing lifesaving aid to families and their children.

We can also impose our own sanctions by refusing to purchase anything that is manufactured in Russia. Some supermarkets are dumping all their stores of Russian Vodka and not buying any Russian spirits.

Now, these actions may seem insignificant, but each of our little efforts will further enforce the sanctions imposed by governments around the world.

We are each to do our part.

As Christians, we are directed by Jesus, "Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who abuse you."

That means, quite simply, that in our prayers, we remember those who are suffering such awful conditions and we remember those who are perpetrating those atrocities.

Now, if you are like me, to pray for Putin and his henchman, sticks in my craw! It is our Lord Himself, though, who tells us we are to pray for them. It is His command.

For you know, at the end of the day, that is the one thing that we can all do to end this conflict and bloody violence that is tearing a people apart.

Pray passionately; pray that God will rid our world of warmongers like Putin; pray that peace will come, and come quickly; pray that He will raise up men and women who work for peace and justice amongst the nations of our world.

In the darkest days of the Second World War, I believe that God raised up Winston Churchill to be our Saviour here.

O, you may sneer, but it was due, in huge measure to his leadership, that he steered us through.

Nowadays he is often reviled as a crude nationalist warmonger, and, of course, he had his blind spots and fallible prejudices, but Churchill the Imperialist it was who nevertheless could write, in the prime of the Raj, about the evil side of Empire, 'the foul path of imperialism' and its 'sordid appetites'.

In short, he was an honest, cultured, artistic, frankly fallible, courageous, gifted and entertaining statesman who helped defeat Hitler and the Nazi hordes, as they sought to enslave the free world.

It is such leaders we need today here in the UK.

No candidate springs immediately to mind. Pray that the Lord will provide.

The Revd Fraser R Aitken, Locum Minister.