

Ukraine Comment

Paul's Letter



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There are times in life when we don't know what to think, times when we don't know what to do. This is probably one of them.

On the morning of Thursday 24th February, we woke to the dreadful news that Vladimir Putin had done what he had repeatedly said he wouldn't do: he had given the order for his troops to invade Ukraine.

Since then, we have watched events unfold in horror, disbelief, and perhaps even dread. Some will recall the dark days of war in Europe from earlier in their lifetimes but, for many of us, this is something entirely new. Of course, many will remember the Yugoslavia Wars in the early 1990s, but what is happening now in Ukraine feels different. We are witnessing scenes that we never believed we would see – war on European soil instigated by the leader of one of the world's major powers. Unsurprisingly, and as a result, we are being confronted by very personal human stories that are truly heart-breaking. These are worrying times. We can only begin to speculate as to what motivates Putin and what his aims and objectives really are; what the response of the West and the rest of the world will ultimately be; and how this will all end.

When we don't know what to think, when we don't know what to do, we should pray. This is what we often conclude as followers of Jesus, even if we might simultaneously feel that, at some level, this isn't enough.

However many feelings of impotence we might be experiencing, we have to believe that, even if we don't know exactly how it works, there is a transformational power to prayer; that prayer can and does change things even if we don't know how. There might be other things that we can do as well – some of which we might discern through the act of praying – but prayer should never be equated to “doing nothing”.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Fyodor Dostoyevsky has the character Zosima, an Elder in a local monastery, offer these words of advice to fellow monks:

'Do not forget to say your prayers. If your prayer is sincere, there will be every time you pray a new feeling containing an idea in it, an idea you did not know before, which will give you fresh courage; you will then understand that prayer is an education.'

Dostoyevsky wrote from experience. Years earlier, he had been arrested and sentenced to death for belonging to a literary group that was deemed subversive by the Russian authorities of his day. Narrowly avoiding the firing squad, he subsequently spent the next four years in a Siberian prison camp. In those dark, dark days, surrounded by acts of brutality and torture, he so experienced the love of God that he found himself transformed.

Sometimes all we can do is pray. It can be enough to unlock something and change everything. So let us pray. Courage and education are much needed now.

With every blessing, *Paul*

A Prayer for peace in Ukraine offered by the Methodist Church:

Holy and Gracious God

We pray for the people of Ukraine and the people of Russia; for their countries and their leaders.

We pray for all those who are afraid; that your everlasting arms hold them in this time of great fear.

We pray for all those who have the power over life and death; that they will choose for all people life, and life in all its fullness.

We pray for those who choose war; that they will remember that you direct your people to turn our swords into ploughshares and seek for peace.

We pray for leaders on the world stage; that they are inspired by the wisdom and courage of Christ.

Above all, Lord, today we pray for peace for Ukraine.

And we ask this in the name of your blessed Son.

Lord have mercy.

Amen

Possible actions

For those who want to help the people of Ukraine, the Guardian newspaper has suggested ways that we can do that.

There are, it reports, several Ukrainian charities working on the ground:

Sunflower of Peace (<https://en-gb.facebook.com/sunflowerofpeace/>) is a charity that helps paramedics and doctors, and has been fundraising for supplies, which include first aid medical tactical backpacks.

United Help Ukraine (<https://unitedhelpukraine.org>) focuses on providing medical supplies and humanitarian aid, and raising awareness of the conflict.

Voices of Children (<https://voices.org.ua/en/>) aims to help children affected by the war in eastern Ukraine, providing support through art therapy, psychologists, video storytelling and a number of other methods.

The British Red Cross

(<https://donate.redcross.org.uk/appeal/ukraine-crisis-appeal>) has launched an emergency appeal to help Ukraine. The charity will be updating its webpage with news on the work its team is doing, and how support will be used to help people. (UNICEF has also launched an appeal: <https://www.unicef.org.uk>).

Additionally, the Guardian article says that we can support local journalism

English-language news outlets based in the country, such as Kyiv Independent (<https://kyivindependent.com>) and the New Voice of Ukraine (<https://english.nv.ua>) are covering developments on the ground as the conflict unfolds, using local journalists. The Kyiv Independent says it was created by journalists in order to defend editorial independence. For those on Twitter, this site (<https://twitter.com/i/lists/101285580>) covers many local journalists in Ukraine.

Finally, the report invites us to write to our local MP to lobby the British government to place further sanctions on the Russian government and its associates. You can get in touch with your local MP via email or post to their constituency address. Instructions on how to get in touch can be found on parliament.uk. (<https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/contact-an-mp-or-lord/contact-your-mp/>)

Beyond the article in the Guardian, a number of charities including Save the Children and Amnesty International have urged the UK Government to play a major role in providing sanctuary and to welcome thousands of refugees from Ukraine. Details on the Homes for Ukraine website.

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