

**Weekly Devotions**  
**South Holburn Church**  
**8th March 2022**

## READINGS

Many peoples will come and say,  
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the temple of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us his ways,  
so that we may walk in his paths.”  
The law will go out from Zion,  
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.  
He will judge between the nations  
and will settle disputes for many peoples.  
They will beat their swords into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation will not take up sword against nation,  
nor will they train for war anymore.  
Come, descendants of Jacob,  
let us walk in the light of the LORD.

*Isaiah 2:3-5*

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, <sup>2</sup>and he began to teach them.  
He said:  
“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.  
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.  
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.  
Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.  
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.  
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.  
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

*Matthew 5:1-12*

Therefore, Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

*John 10:7-10*

## REFLECTION

The images we are seeing from Ukraine are heart-breaking. Centuries of architecture being reduced to rubble, beautiful buildings destroyed. Worse than the destruction is the contempt for life that is being shown. In the race to crush opposition it seems that everyone is fair game to the invaders. No life matters. It seems as if it means nothing to take the life not of just of opposing soldiers, but also of civilians, of ordinary men, women and children. We have seen homes destroyed, blocks of flats fired upon, we have seen shops and community buildings targeted and blown up.

Images on our TV screens have shown us groups of people huddled in underground shelters, the worry and fear etched onto their faces and the noise of battle rages outside. No one knowing what they will see again when they emerge into the light.

Thousands have fled the machines of war. Heart wrenching scenes have been played out time and time again at train stations and bus stations across Ukraine as families are torn apart - mothers and sisters, wives and children boarding train carriages, fathers and sons and brothers remaining behind to defend their land. The tearful faces catching a last glimpse of loved ones through carriage windows.

Homes and possessions left behind. A lifetime of memories abandoned. They arrive in foreign places lost and disorientated, unsure what happens next.

But we have seen the kindness of which we as people are capable of. The extra-ordinary generosity of those willing to share homes and food with strangers. The folk waiting at train stations ready to help – to guide and to provide. The donations of clothing and food from all over the world arriving by the hour to warm the bodies and fill the bellies and tell, through actions, that so many do care.

As we watch on from afar, we feel appalled, angry, powerless to help and afraid of what lies ahead for other nations, for Europe, for the world and for us.

Alongside the images of war and violence, there are other images too. Images of people at prayer. Images of people at worship services. Images of faith. Those images are a reminder to us all that no matter the circumstances, no matter the depths of depravity that we can sink to as a species, we worship a God who will never leave us alone, who will never forsake us, never stop loving us. We worship a God who holds a special place for the oppressed and the broken. We worship a God who hears prayers and offers an eternal home, which no amount of violence, no size of army, no dictator, however powerful can ever defeat, take control of, or take away from us.

With utter certainty, we declare that God is with every desperate person today, that God is in every underground shelter, that God fills every train carriage of refugees, that God is in every hospital ward.

And with utter faith, let us go on praying for peace, go on praying for the displaced, go on praying for justice. Let us never neglect our Saviour's call to do good for others, whatever the cost to us. Let us ask God to move us, challenge us, lead us to act, so that our prayers are not merely the words of the pious, spoken in security, but a cause of action around the world that cause nations to move to peace, and which cause a

commitment that every refugee has a home and every family is reunited and every person has a future in their homeland.

Amen

## **PRAYER**

*(I seldom use prayers provided by others, but today's prayer comes from Christian author, Nick Fawcett and is written in response to the conflict in Ukraine.)*

How would I cope, Lord, with the bombs falling,  
the shells screaming,  
the destruction escalating,  
the death toll rising,  
the chaos intensifying,  
the bloodshed worsening,  
the threat growing,  
the enemy advancing,  
the casualties multiplying,  
the suffering mounting?  
How would I cope with fleeing as a refugee,  
separation from loved ones,  
loss of family and friends,  
my home reduced to rubble,  
my country overrun,  
the slaughter of innocents,  
suppression of freedom,  
the daily threat of violence and death,  
the triumph of despotism,  
the tragedy of war?  
I do not know for sure, Lord,  
but I fear I'd cope badly, if at all,  
such horrors being too dreadful to contemplate.  
Reach out to those who have no choice but to endure them,  
who find their world shattered,  
their lives overwhelmed,  
the future they anticipated cruelly plucked from them.  
Reach out to those who feel numbed,  
crushed,  
desperate,  
broken.  
Grant them the support they need to somehow resist,  
somehow survive,  
somehow look forward,  
somehow cope with everything that is being thrown  
against them,  
and, with your help, to get through.  
Amen.

