

Thursday 10 March

Matthew 5: 43 - 45

43 'You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbour and hate your enemy." 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

This war in Europe has been raging now for two weeks with no real respite or end in sight. Many of the world powers have imposed sanctions on Russia and the Oligarchs of Russia, and many international businesses have pulled out of Russia and yet still the war rages on.

Today we reflect on the many innocent and indoctrinated people of Russia. There are those who know the truth and have taken the risk of protesting against what their government is doing, thousands of whom have been arrested and imprisoned, while others have chosen rather to flee from Russia to Finland and neighbouring countries. Many who remain hear only what the Russian Government wants them to hear as any independent or foreign news agencies have stopped reporting after the new law was passed that anyone not reporting official government sanctioned news could face up to 15 years in jail. Those ordinary Russians who only hear that this military operation into Ukraine is for the benefit of the Ukrainian people to rescue them from genocide and Neo-Nazi leaders probably do not understand why so many other countries and businesses are punishing them for it. Many Russians have family in Ukraine and don't believe what is happening. We think of the many Russian mothers, wives, girlfriends and children who are waiting at home to hear news of the men that they love who are fighting in a conflict which should have been quick and easy and now is dragging on with far more casualties than expected. As much as we condemn Russia for the attack on Ukraine may we remember that it was not the ordinary citizens that attacked but President Putin and the Kremlin that gave the orders to many men who now are wondering whether they are really doing the right thing.

However, the ordinary Russian people are not exactly the enemies here. When Jesus speaks about loving and praying for enemies and those that persecute, I guess, it will translate more into praying for Putin and the Kremlin and those soldiers sending missiles into civilian areas. It's a lot harder to look on them with sympathy and even harder to think about loving them. Then again, God loves us and never gives up on us no matter how far we turn from him.

Prayer

Lord we pray for the Russian people

Protect those who have been arrested for protesting this unjust war.

Shelter those who are fleeing their homes to avoid persecution.

Comfort those who have lost or are worried about loved ones in Ukraine.

Lord, as we think of state captured media in Russia and both Ukraine and Russia claiming they are in the right and the other are terrorists, we pray for the whole truth to be exposed. Let all that has been taking place on both sides be revealed.

Lord, we find it very difficult to love people and a country who seem to have made it their mission to destroy another country. Blowing up buildings, levelling homes and killing innocent people. Help us to love even them.

We pray for Putin and the Kremlin. We pray that they will know your love for them. We pray that they will know how great your grace is and will repent and seek your forgiveness for the atrocities they have caused. We pray that as they are filled with your love, they will rule their country with your love. That they will bring freedom back to a country that has a terrible past of control and fear. We pray that they will look at strengthening and rebuilding a democratically fair Russia rather than trying to annex and control other countries.

Lord, we pray for those Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine, especially those who are able to cause such destruction by the push of a button and never have to face the people they hurt. We pray that you will work on their consciences and may they think of the innocent men, women and children that they are harming. We pray that they will know that you are their ultimate commander and that your orders are for peace and an end to all violence.

Lord, as we learn to love our enemies and pray for them, we pray that both the people and leaders of Ukraine and Russia would hear you speaking these words to them and they would put down their weapons and instead embrace each other. We pray that as the two foreign ministers meet today they will find a peaceful solution to end this conflict.

Lord at this time these requests seem almost too impossible to even pray, but nothing is impossible for you and so we bring our ultimate hopes and prayers to you.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen.

Rev KS Brown