

13th March Online Worship

Welcome to Worship:

Call to Worship:

If God is a hen,

we are under God's wing.

If God is a table,

we each have a seat.

If God is a house,

we are safe from the storm.

If God is a party,

we're invited to dance.

If God is a melody,

our names are the lyrics.

If this is God's house,

then all are welcomed. All are loved. All belong.

Let us worship Holy god.

Opening Hymn: [Holy Holy Holy](#)

Opening Prayers:

Call to Confession

Family of faith,

we come to confession not to wallow in our own guilt.

Instead, we come to confession because we know

that change starts with being honest.

So in a desire to grow and change,

let us pray to a God who loves us like a mother hen.

Let us confess our sins together. . .

Prayer of Confession

When the Pharisees tried to stop Jesus, Jesus said,

"I will keep on."

I will keep on healing.

I will keep on teaching.

I will keep on preaching.

I will keep on flipping the tables of injustice.

I will keep on treating every person like a child of God.

I will keep on believing that this world can change.

**I will keep on
and keep on
and keep on until God's promised day.
Forgive us, God, for the times when we stop.
Amen.**

Words of Forgiveness

Family of faith, because Jesus' love just keeps going, we can trust that that love and grace exists for us.

So rest in this good news:

No matter what we do wrong or what we leave undone, we are under God's wing.

**We are loved, held, and forgiven. Thanks be to God for a love like that!
Amen.**

Hymn The God who laid the earth's foundations (He is here)

Prayer for Illumination

Holy God, this life of ours is full to the brim.

Our days are overflowing with emails and to-do lists, schedules and notifications, assignments and deadlines.

We wake up feeling behind, we go to sleep worrying about tomorrow, and we know—there has to be more than this.

So we pray: bend down and show us the way.

Leave breadcrumbs in the street.

Point us toward awe and wonder.

Guide us to intimacy and trust.

Gift us with laughter that will make us cry and hope that will make us feel alive.

We want a new kind of full to the brim.

Show us the way.

We are listening for your cues.

Gratefully we pray, amen.

Scripture: [Psalm 27](#)

[Luke 13:31-35](#)

Reflection:

For the past few weeks, we have heard and seen almost minute by minute of the invasion by the Russian Federation of the invasion of Ukraine. We have seen images of farmers towing Russian tanks, the world almost universally uniting to sanction and to put financial and economic curbs on Russia. We have seen the regular parading of POW's and been aghast as the sight of schools and hospitals purposely being destroyed in Ukraine. The figure for the destruction of infrastructure in Ukraine has already reached 120 billion US dollars. Let alone the countless lives forever destroyed and scarred. We have seen the ways in which the Europe has opened its borders and We may have learnt how to spell Kyiv instead of the Russian way Kiev. We may have learnt that the country name is Ukraine and not The Ukraine. But we are unlikely to see in the usual media and social media of the role of the church in all this pain and suffering. What you are unlikely to have seen is the spiritual response / role of the church in this. And it is very important that we as church have a good public theology in this space.

Isaiah 2:3-5

Contemporary English Version

Many people will come and say, "Let's go to the mountain of the Lord God of Jacob and worship in his temple."

The Lord will teach us his Law from Jerusalem, and we will obey him. He will settle arguments between nations.

They will pound their swords and their spears into rakes and shovels; they will never make war or attack one another.

People of Israel, let's live by the light of the Lord.

In other translations the words used in these well-known words of scripture about the changing of war instruments into instruments of productivity render this way "they will turn their swords into ploughshares". Significantly America had a trial nuclear bomb program called Project Plowshare. development of techniques to use nuclear explosives for peaceful construction purposes. As part of the program, 31 nuclear warheads were detonated in 27 separate tests. Plowshare was the US portion of what are called Peaceful Nuclear Explosions (PNE); a similar Soviet program was carried out under the name Nuclear Explosions for the National Economy. The United Kingdom and Canada too had plans to use

nuclear weapons to aid in the extraction of fossil fuels. The use of nuclear weapons however was found by the general populace to be untenable.

We regularly speak of the prince of peace, and we often recite the beatitudes that speak “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”. And yet we often see the church getting rather cozy with regards to war, and those who wage war. In New Zealand we are largely disconnected from the ways that church and state can become intertwined and therefore compromise the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When I was in Canada last, I attended an Anglican service in Halifax. It happened to be Canada Day. Situated in pride of place alongside the communion table was the Canadian national flag. The juxtaposition between the Flag and the symbols of the church was quite telling. It was even more so when towards the end of the service people stood, turned to the flag and placing the hand on heart sang the national anthem of Canada.

Of late much has given me concern about the way in which the Russian Orthodox church has been seen to endorse and support the way in which the Russian federation has invaded the sovereign country of Ukraine.

The Russian Orthodox Church has long lent its considerable influence, within Russia and abroad, to the geopolitical aims of Vladimir Putin. The Russian president has enjoyed close personal support from Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, who once characterized Putin’s leadership as “a miracle of God.”

While Kirill called on military leaders to minimize casualties when Putin’s assault on Ukraine began last week, he seemed to support Putin’s disputed argument that Ukrainians and Russians are one people and notably made no appeal for a cessation of hostilities. A few days later, Kirill referred to Russia’s opponents in Ukraine as “evil forces.”

A letter however has been signed by last count over 275 Orthodox priests and deacons calling for cessation of the War

This is an image of a report of an Orthodox priest being arrested for preaching the Gospel, and by inference preaching against the Russian president. He faces 15 years.

Now we may think this aligning the church and the militaries of the world is a new development it is sadly not.

Checkout these images of priests, rabbis, ministers both catholic and protestant all blessing the weapons of war.

We saw the German church largely aligning itself with Nazi Germany.

Orthodox leaders have called on the Russian patriarch to do more to stop the war. In an open letter published Wednesday, Romanian Orthodox priest Ioan Sauca, the acting general secretary of the World Council of Churches, urged Kirill to persuade Putin to end the bloodshed.

“I write to Your Holiness as acting general secretary of the WCC but also as an Orthodox priest,” Sauca wrote. “Please, raise up your voice and speak on behalf of the suffering brothers and sisters, most of whom are also faithful members of our Orthodox Church.”

In addition, a group of Catholic bishops from Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales issued a statement this week calling on “Patriarch Kirill and all in the Russian Orthodox Church” to work to end the war.

Meanwhile, back in the 1st Rome, another Christian heart still beats. “In Ukraine, rivers of blood and tears are flowing,” Pope Francis announced on Sunday while addressing followers in St. Peter’s Square. “This is not just a military operation but a war which sows death, destruction and misery.” Francis also referred to Ukraine as a “martyred country” and urged other nations to offer humanitarian aid to its people.

It should be no surprise that Patriarch Kirill has attempted to provide cover for Putin’s unprovoked and brutal aggression against Ukraine, which Kirill has long insisted is part of the Russkiy mir, the “Russian world.” The war in Ukraine, he said on the fourth day of the Russian invasion of its neighbor, had been caused by “dark and hostile external powers,” the “forces of evil,” and “the attacks of the evil one.”

Because Ukraine is in the grip of “the evil one,” Russia is justified in obliterating its land, its people, and its future as a democracy. This is the nastiest public theology.

There are glimmers of hope, Christian faith, and love amidst the suffering.

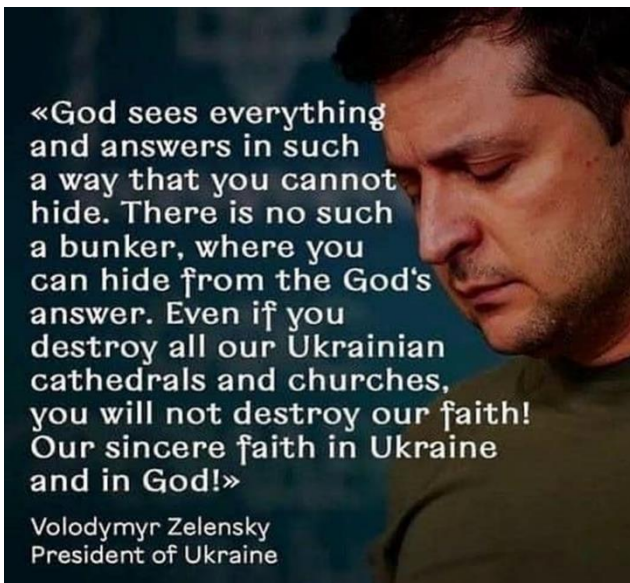
Ukraine is a deeply Christian country. With some 71% of the population in 2018 declaring themselves to be believers. I shared last week, and you can watch it online, the people of Ukraine some from their bunkers reading the bible - Psalm 31.

My sister sent me this picture of a statue of Jesus being put in a bunker for safe keeping. The last time was during WW2.

And the faith of the President of Ukraine is evident in his speeches.

In this Lenten season how are we to honour the gospel of love as the church?

In our reading from Luke we see



Jesus as prophet, speaking truth to power. This speaking of Jesus see's him identified as a threat. And just like John the Baptist, would lead to his death. We read of a lament for the city of Jerusalem, a place of sadness where prophets had already been killed, and later on early

Christian witnesses would also be martyred.

Jesus pronounces doom upon the city, which was to be followed eventually by its destruction in A.D. 70. The passage ends with Jesus' declaration that the people of the city will not see him until the messianic expectation of Psalm 118:26 is fulfilled:

“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” These words are similar to the words that the people cry out who welcome Jesus as he rides into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday just prior to his death: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Jerusalem refuses to listen to those messengers who proclaim the justice and the reign of God. For that reason, the city stands under divine judgment.

But what about the present. Who or what is the 'Jerusalem' of the day in which we live? Is it the political and civic sphere? Is it the religious sphere? Or is it both? Jerusalem was a centre of both political and religious power

and activity in the days of Jesus, but it refused to heed its prophets, of which Jesus himself was one.

We need to recall that when judgment is declared, the purpose for such is that those upon whom the judgment falls may come to know their plight, repent, and be renewed. Judgment is pronounced for the sake of salvation.

We read of the laments that Jesus has for Jerusalem. On the one hand, they express sadness and describe a distressing state of affairs. But on the other hand, they presuppose that God exists, hears one's cry, and has the power to turn that which is lamentable into something that is good.

And so, we the church as we look to the future, are called to stand on the side of God's will for a just, secure, and peaceful world. All of our hopes and God's will may not be realized completely in history, but they will be fulfilled at the coming of the Blessed One, who comes in the name of the Lord — in God's own time. In the meantime we pray and we tell the gospel story, of the one who came for the peace of the world.

Hymn: [In troubled times \(Unshakeable\)](#)

Affirmation of Faith - A modern paraphrase of Psalm 27

The Lord is my light.

The Lord surrounds me like a warm, familiar quilt, in layers of grace.

Whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the sturdy foundation and the roof over my head.

I am not afraid.

When the world is at its worst— when grief clings to my bones,
when fear eats at my confidence, when loneliness moves into my house—

God sets the table, turns on the lights,
and invites me to dance.

So even though there are days that feel like too much to bear,
I know—I am not alone.

So I ask the Lord,

I seek and I pray—

let me live in your house
all of my days. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession:

Loving God, your Son Jesus Christ, wept over Jerusalem.

Today, we weep over Ukraine.

We weep for those uprooted from their homes and lives.

We weep for those cowering in basements.

We weep for those who have witnessed death and destruction on their streets.

We weep for those separated from parents, from children, from spouses and siblings.

We are amazed at the resilience of people seeking to comfort those in need and so we pray for Governments opening up borders so that Ukrainians can have safe passage.

We pray for churches and individuals providing food, clothing and shelter. We pray for medical workers ensuring that shattered bodies are put back together again.

We pray for ordinary Russians demonstrating and voicing their disapproval of the military actions in Ukraine.

May the Holy Spirit give us the willpower to turn our tears into action also.

May we, through our words, prayers and example pursue the things that make for a just peace in the world today and especially in Ukraine.

In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray.

Amen - Methodist Church UK

Song: [Where are you in the storm](#)

Benediction:

God is our light, our hope, our all in all:

Blessed be God, now and forever!

Christ is our home, our life, our joy:

Blessed be God, now and forever!

Our worship concludes; our service continues.

Blessed be God, now and forever!

Andrew Howley

13.03.2022