

## Pastoral Letter

Dear Friends,

On Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> March we awoke to the terrifying news that Russia had invaded the Ukraine. Daily we have watched with a growing sense of horror, anger, fear and frustration the news of civilians being killed, towns, surrounded by tanks, having water and electricity switched off, and tens of thousands of women and children fleeing from the country. The dream, the hope that our home continent of Europe would never see the flames of war, has been shattered.

Pastorally, I have heard of numerous stories of people crying as they have watched and listened to British news reports of the fighting. Like many I have found myself turning the news off, unable to comprehend the cruelty and wanton destruction of a peaceful democratic country.

The attack on the largest European civil nuclear power station in the Ukraine, combined with the threat of nuclear weapons, has sent shock waves around the world. Our interdependence has never so plainly been seen to be so true.

We are left wondering where the Good News is in all of this.

Let us not forget that Putin was part of the notorious KGB which played a significant role in the Communist regime. According to one source, between 50 – 60 million people in Russia were killed by Communist terror between 1917 -1991. This does not include the 27 million Soviet lives lost during the Second World War, which Stalin helped to unleash.

Communist terror must have had a brutalising effect on all caught up in this dark web of history, affecting victims and perpetrators alike. It is easy to see how any personal moral compass could be completely destroyed in this litany of fear, destruction and death.

This is not to make excuses or to condone violence; we are all responsible for our actions. There is no excuse whatsoever in using hateful words, a clenched fist or bombing a maternity hospital. No cause can be justified by such actions.

We need to live out another story.

*"Is this not the fast I choose, to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke?"*

*Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and to bring the homeless poor into your home, when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin"? Isaiah 58: vs 6 – 7.*

Hatred and brutality have no right to exist in God's world. We must pray and work to see this happen. The words of Isaiah above are clear and uncompromising.

On Easter day the world was born into a new and living hope that death had been overcome in the risen Christ. This has to be our light in the darkness in which we now find ourselves.

We cannot afford to neglect the Easter Story as though it was a piece of fiction. Without the hope of transformational love destroying death we will always struggle to love our neighbour and fail to see that we are all made in the image of God.

My prayer for this season of Lent and Easter is that God may graciously return us all to the path of peace.

Reverend John Gordon