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Weekly Letter – 3 March 2024

John 2:13-22

Angry?

I wonder how you picture Jesus as he drives the animals and doves and those who sell them out of the temple? The other gospel writers say that God's house should be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers! Those are quotes from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 which give a basis for Jesus' actions. John says, 'Zeal for your house eats me up!' (quoting Psalm 69:9) which is more of a description of Jesus. The root of 'zeal' is 'boiling over' and it is closely related to 'anger'. So much for 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild' but 'zeal' sounds positive, whilst 'anger' is often seen as a negative emotion in Christian circles. That's probably because Jesus says being angry with someone brings down judgement (Matt 5:22) and Ephesians advises against letting the sun go down on your anger (Eph 4:26).

So, do you think Jesus was angry when he cleansed the temple? Another distinctive part of John's version is that Jesus makes a whip of cords to drive out the animals. The time taken to do that suggests this isn't Jesus losing his temper: this is considered and controlled. Perhaps righteous anger is OK, like God being angry in the Psalms? Or is anger OK for God and Jesus, but too hot for us to handle?

I grew up learning anger is a bad thing. Trying to repress some emotions can limit our expression of all emotions. There may be times when the answer to 'What would Jesus do?' is 'get angry'. It is good to be angry about injustice and exploitation. That's different to losing our temper or being angry *at* someone. It's different to some personalities flaring up more easily than others. It's different to the anger that comes with grief and hurt. Coping with anger needs more time and space than this brief reflection can give. Understanding where our anger comes from and how to calm it is part of handling it well. Directing our zeal effectively is part of following the way of Jesus.

Maybe you can find time to read the passage through again a couple of times. Then replay the events in your mind using your imagination as if it were a film. Think about what your senses might have experienced – the smells, the sounds. Where are you in the scene? How do you react? Talk to God in prayer about what you notice. You are also welcome to have a conversation with me if it helps.

Simon

**Sunday Morning Worship in Christ Well, and on Zoom at 10.30 am will be led by Rev Simon Walkling.**

**We will celebrate Communion. Bible Readings: John 2.13-22: 1 Corinthians 1.18-25**

**Cycle of Prayer in the Region – we will pray for Temple, Gowerton**

Tea and Chat – Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> - 2-4 pm – St David's Day activities

**Induction of the New Synod Moderator** – at Beulah URC, Rhiwbina, on 06/04/24 at 2pm  
We are invited to the induction of David Salisbury as our new Synod Moderator.

### **Silver Award of Eco Church**

You are invited to attend a **'Going Greener Coffee Morning'** on **March 9th at 10.30 until 12.00 and learn more!**

The Elders, Simon and Adella are giving thought to the Silver Award of Eco Church; both for the Church and the Community Project.

We are looking further as to how as a church and a community resource we can develop more green initiatives and to learn what other churches and organisations in the area are doing too.

**Full but empty** (Lectionary readings: Exodus 20.1-17: Psalm 19: 1 Corinthians 1.18-25: John 2.13-22)

Eternal God, like a temple full of traders we fill our lives with busyness.

Scarcely pausing in our rush to make the best use of every moment,  
we forget to evaluate what we are doing, we forget to pause and consider.

How does this bring you glory;  
how does this build the kingdom;  
how does this enable my journey  
towards the fullness of my humanity?

You call us to walk the way of Jesus, to be love in the world, to radiate compassion and justice.

When our lives are full of haste, but empty of love,  
may we feel your cleansing Spirit questioning and overturning our mindless actions,  
and the mindful way of Jesus nudging us back onto the path of love and the journey to wholeness.

Heather Whyte (URC Prayer Handbook 2024)

Our thanks to Yana for writing the following article about Ukraine.

# 730 days of February

## Dedicated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the Russian invasion in Ukraine

We have so much to say, and we shall never say it.

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It is very queer that the unhappiness of the world is often brought on by small men.

Erich Maria Remarque, "All Quiet on the Western Front"

I've always been fascinated by the history of war. I've watched numerous movies and documentaries, read many books in order to understand the chronology, motives, and hidden purposes behind the tragedies created by someone's political ambitions. I deeply respect the heroes of the world wars who fought for peace worldwide and victims of the battles for freedom of their countries. But even with all this, my reflections on the 11th of November or the 8th of May are not even remotely close to what I feel when I think about the 24th of February 2022.

The war that started exactly 2 years ago and is still ongoing is personal to me. Studying the history of world wars and being deeply interested in this topic, it never crossed my mind that I would personally experience military actions, shelling, invasion, bombing, and dashes to shelters. But no, I had to. At 4:20 AM of the February 24, 2022, when all people were in bed having dreams about their peaceful futures, Russia attacked Ukraine. I, as well as millions of Ukrainians, have become not only witnesses, but also the main characters of the terrible onslaught created by Putin and implemented by millions of his fascists. And the day the war began, I remember as if it was yesterday.

I remember the tanks of Ukrainian soldiers passing through the city to the east to engage with the occupiers. I remember how our brave guys waved to us, the city residents, and promised that everything would be okay. I also remember the Russian tanks (easy to distinguish - they are marked with the letter Z) that stormed into the city. I remember the ensuing tank battle. And how we sought refuge from shelling while lying in the hallway, and how we encountered a Russian spy on the street (I had to carry the knife in my pocket in case of a spy attack, can you believe that?). Everything is kept in my mind: the sirens, the airstrikes, and the enemy marker on the roof of my house, which we tried to destroy together with all the neighbours. Now, I can't be surprised by a war movie - I could write a script for my own, based on real events.

By February 26th, my hometown Mykolayiv, where I, my entire family, and my friends were located, was surrounded by Russian troops from three sides. The path was short - cross the Crimean isthmus, seize Kherson, then another hour on a tank, and you're already at the entrance to Mykolayiv. My city has a unique geographical location - it's practically surrounded by winding rivers from all sides. From all sides except the east - the road from which Russian troops were already advancing. These rivers became both a defense for the southwestern settlements (slowing down the advancement of troops) and a trap for me and the residents of my city, because raised bridges meant not only obstacles for the occupiers but also the lack of supplies of any kind of food and medicine from the still free part of Ukraine. We found ourselves trapped between approaching enemies and rivers, with empty shelves in

supermarkets and huge lines at pharmacies and ATMs. At the same time, we were still being shelled and bombed, and every day lived seemed like a gift from above.

Then the battle for the city started. Russian tanks on the streets, shattered windows of houses from explosive waves, fragments, and bullets. We had no idea what would happen next. The only thing we knew for sure was that life with Russia would become hell on earth, and occupation would be death. The subsequent events in Bucha, Irpin, Hostomel, Kherson, Kupyansk, and other occupied cities proved it: if you support Ukraine, the Russians will torture, rape, and then kill you. That's why, under the threat of encirclement and occupation, in the absence of regular food supplies, and amidst constant shelling, we had to leave our hometown Mykolayiv. At that time, it seemed like it would only be for 2-3 months. Spoiler alert: reality turned out to be much worse.

Two years have ALREADY passed - whether it's a lot or a little, judge for yourself. A lot has happened in two years, but still, the 24th of February, for me, is a milestone that divided everything into "before" and "after." Now life exists in two dimensions: before the war and nowadays. That's why I always remember this day with deep pain and an unbearable longing for the life that *can never be brought back*. That's what touches me the most – the images of what Ukraine and my life were like before.

You might be interested in what someone under bombardment thinks about. I'll put it briefly: about life and death. About what you still haven't done, what you still haven't said, what you haven't decided on, and what you won't be able to leave after your end. All material things become unimportant. Only people, actions, and the memory you can leave about yourself matter. When I lay in the hallway under bombardment and the walls and doors of my apartment shook, I personally thought about how unattractive the date of my death would look on my tombstone. And most importantly, who and what would even be written on it if my family didn't survive this day either?

War is not what they show in movies. Just believe me, war is not romantic at all. Heroism and courage alternate with animal fear, and all you long for is not heroics but the fastest end to this nightmare. However, in this narrative, I am not going to tell you about the historical facts of tragedies of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Bucha Massacre, the defense of Mariupol, the siege of Avdiivka, the bombing of Kyiv, or the battle for Mykolayiv - you can read about all of this on the internet if you want. The peculiarities of 21st-century wars - you can observe them almost live, with all the photo and video evidence. As modern historians have already said, this war will become the most documented war in the world. Instead, I want to talk about how hard it is for a democratic country in the center of Europe (and each of its citizens) to be part of a war unfairly unleashed against it. It's an unbearable burden when your enemy outweighs you by tens of times, when he has more soldiers and weapons, and he attacks. But even despite the unequal forces, you can't afford to surrender because you're defending yourself! You're defending your children, and all of Europe, which, if Ukraine falls, will become the next target of fascist Russia.

Pay attention to how many Western leaders talk about a potential Russian invasion of Europe in the next five years. British leaders urge men to undergo mandatory military training, the governments of the Netherlands, Belgium, Poland, Sweden, and Estonia repeatedly increase their defense spending. The presidents of France and Germany call on the civilian population to be prepared for an escalation of war, initiated by Russia, in the coming years. Just think about it - these are not just words. These are proven facts, intelligence data, conclusions of the global community. I understand if it's hard to believe in the threat of war; I didn't believe it either at one point. But Russia's aggression is still *just* a threat (not a reality) to Europe because it is being defended by Ukraine. And the price of this defense is excessively high.

Ukrainians experienced a strong shock, being the first on the list of bloody Putin. Right now, Ukraine is in the most difficult and complex situation throughout the war. President Zelensky has stated directly - 2024 will be decisive. Ukraine desperately lacks Western weapons and the support of the entire world. As my

cousin, who is currently on the front line in the southeast direction, says, "*The weapons are running out, and so are we.*" It's unbearably painful to watch because human losses are the most terrible.

For a long time, I asked myself the question "For what?". It's, of course, rhetorical. There are no reasons or blame for Ukrainians here. It's solely the fault of Russians. And yes, I don't say "Putin's fault" because Putin doesn't personally shoot from a gun, doesn't rape women in occupied cities, doesn't launch missiles and air-bombs. Putin didn't kill a three-year-old child from Irpin and didn't force his mother to watch him die slowly. He didn't decapitate partisans in the occupation and didn't murder unarmed prisoners of war. He doesn't launch anti-ship missiles at residential buildings, shopping centers, hospitals, and schools. All these crimes are the fault not of one, but of hundreds of thousands and millions of people. It's the fault of the entire Russian nation, and the war only proved the fact that the this nation is completely rotten from within. A country of slaves, stuck in the mentality of threats from the "collective West" and lacking critical thinking. You wonder why they've got such a president. But who chose him? The answer is simple: people like him.

I pray for this war to end with Ukraine's victory and for peace to come to my country. But I also pray for *justice*. I want this horrifying and terribly unjust genocide of my people not to go unpunished. Let the day come when Ukrainian tears and Ukrainian blood stop flowing, and all those guilty of this tragedy stand before the judgment of God and bear their responsibility.

"Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold;  
My chosen one in whom My soul delights.  
I have put My Spirit upon Him;  
He will bring forth justice to the nations.  
He will not cry out or raise His voice,  
Nor make His voice heard in the street.  
A bruised reed He will not break  
And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish;  
He will faithfully bring forth justice.  
He will not be disheartened or crushed  
Until He has established justice in the earth;  
And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law."  
(Isaiah 42:1-4)

By Yana