

Dear friends,

As I write this, the situation in Ukraine becomes increasingly grave as Russia's dawn missile bombardment marks a declaration of war and Russian troops advance on Kyiv (Kiev). There are reports of hundreds of thousands trying to flee on gridlocked roads. The world looks on horrified and appalled. Whilst the UK and the US issue tough sanctions most of us feel helpless to know how we can help, what we can do.

One way might be a donation to one of the emergency appeals such as UNICEF or the British Red Cross or #Help Ukraine Emergency Appeal which was set up earlier this month by the Association of Ukrainians in UK.

Another way is to help curb the spread of disinformation. The Ukrainian Crisis Media Centre says that we should look for 'reliable and fact-checked news' and also to boycott Russian goods and services.

As Christians we have another means of supporting Ukraine as we can – indeed MUST – turn to God in prayer. Almost all the churches have published prayers on their websites and social media and the one from the Methodist Church UK is printed below, but sometimes our own words, spoken from the heart, are the best – inadequate though we may feel them to be. I urge you to pray and to continue to pray. The worst thing we could do at this time is to become inured and turn deaf ears and blind eyes to what is going on. This is a political war with human suffering an inevitable outcome; it is also a spiritual war in which prayer is a powerful weapon.

The current news is so overwhelming that it is hard to think beyond it, but we are about to enter Lent, that traditional time of abstinence and penance. It is a time when we often choose to forgo some luxury and spend more time in prayer. We think of the words that are spoken at Ash Wednesday services, such as the Circuit Service at Woosehill (see advert on website): 'Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return. Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ.' The words take on new meaning as we remember the fragility of life and the need to be close to Jesus at all times.

Our Lent study this year seems more than usually relevant in the circumstances. It is entitled '*Why would a good God allow suffering?*' and is adapted from a study of the same name by Discovery House Publishers who also bring you '*Our Daily Bread*' Bible study notes. It will be held on Wednesday afternoons 2pm by Zoom (please contact Sharon for the link). If you are unable to Zoom but would like to follow the course on your own at home, please let me know and I will make notes available for you.

It is hard not to be brought low by the knowledge of what is going on but please remember that we have a God whose love is stronger than death, whose light in Christ the darkness can never overcome.

In love and prayer,

Sharon

Prayer for Peace for Ukraine from the Methodist Church

Holy and Gracious God

We pray for the people of the Ukraine and the people of Russia; for their countries and their leaders.

We pray for all those who are afraid; that your everlasting arms hold them in this time of great fear.

We pray for all those who have the power over life and death; that they will choose for all people life, and life in all its fullness.

We pray for those who choose war; that they will remember that you direct your people to turn our swords into ploughshares and seek for peace.

We pray for leaders on the world stage; that they are inspired by the wisdom and courage of Christ.

Above all, Lord, today we pray for peace for Ukraine.

And we ask this in the name of your blessed Son.

Lord have mercy.

Amen