

Friday 4th March 2022

Getting up around 7am I'll generally make myself a coffee and ease into the day. Today though I found myself irritated that I'd forgotten to wash up the milk jug and my favourite coffee mug from the night before and the dishwasher that I thought had been on was full of dirty dishes. All this delayed my caffeine intake at the desired time. Then I discovered that the Wi-Fi was down and the inconvenience of that. At that point I decided to sit down and pop the TV on. What I saw pulled me up short. Miles and miles of cars stretching as far back as the eye could see in gridlock. The reason? The people of the Kyiv, the capital city of Ukraine leaving en masse as the rhetoric of invasion that had been brewing for months finally materialised in the early hours with a unequivocal directive from Moscow to enter Ukraine by force.

I wondered what it was that stopped me in my tracks on this occasion? Only 9/11 and The Falklands conflict had the same effect. There is ongoing war and tragedy of huge proportions in Syria not to mention Afghanistan and atrocities elsewhere. It's not that I feel anaesthetised to these situations, though in an age of rolling news on a multi platform, it's too easy to scroll on through to find something lighter by way of escapism.

Not today. Is it the close proximity of Ukraine? After all this is Europe and a whole lot closer to home. Is it the visceral rhetoric from the aggressor that is deeply concerning? What about the other countries that border Russia and previously were part of the bloc. Where does NATO play a part in this? And selfishly, how does this affect me?

I say selfishly but actually that question can be viewed in two ways. The first which says: How am I impacted in a way that is detrimental to me, my family, my community etc in both direct and indirect ways? In other words, will war spread and involve the UK? is a direct response. Will cost of living and fuel prices increase? is perhaps an indirect consequence of the escalation. But the bottom line is that the viewing of that question is seen through the lens of 'me, myself and I' and therefore it brings my concerns into play.

How about though if I ask the same question but viewed through a telescope and not a mirror. How does *this* affect me? In other words, what is my response to this crisis that switches the focus away from me to those who are - quite literally - in the line of fire. How am I affected by what I see and hear playing out in Ukraine that spurs me into action? In the first instance, I become acutely aware that those irritations that I woke up to this morning are very much 'first world problems'. There's nobody in that line of traffic worrying about their morning routine being disrupted by not getting their regular flat white fix. They are fleeing for their lives. I need to hold lightly those things that are inconsequential and give thanks for the macro picture of freedom that I enjoy here in the UK.

Secondly, having factored that my irritations are ridiculous in the light of what is happening, what can I now do? Is there anything that can be done? As I wrestled with this, my phone started to ping. Various posts on WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter all with the same title #PrayForUkraine. An eclectic mix of young and old,

people with deep rooted faith and none all unified in concern and sadness. I can't play a political part on the world stage in resolving this crisis but I can cry out to God.

So that's what I did. Not in a way that was a 'tick list' approach to prayer but rather a heart cry to Almighty God to intervene. I took the unusual step of writing it down in a way that made me think hard about what I was praying and why. I offer it to you now: *Heavenly Father, Eternal Refuge, Helper in time of need, We lift up the country of Ukraine and its people to you at this time of crisis. Dark forces are at work driven by irrational greed and power that would seek to decimate and destroy innocent lives by the brutal means of artillery and warfare. We pray in the mighty and victorious name of Jesus for a changing of the narrative. We pray for a turning back from the anger, rhetoric and tragedy of war. Where humankind will fall short, by your holy spirit You, Almighty God can make a way where there is seemingly no way. May there be a divine intervention that sees invasion replaced by withdrawal. We cry out for mercy, for justice and for peace. In an age of mis-information, may there be a clarion call to truth and may truth speak to power in a way that is sanctified in wisdom and full of the heart cry of compassion that emanates from your heart of love for all creation. We pray for more of the not yet of your kingdom now Lord. We ask in weakness but with a whole hearted mustard seed belief that You who can move mountains will prevail.*

We ask this, joining with millions if not billions of others petitioning before your throne of grace, and do so in the risen name of Jesus Christ, conqueror of death and bringer of life.

I simply ask you in the coming days to add your own prayer(s) bringing Ukraine and it's people before God. It may be an intangible offering to you but it matters to the people of Ukraine right now. Let's do so in faith.