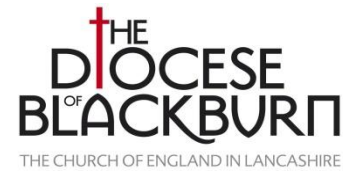


# WEEKLY SERMON

communicate@blackburn.anglican.org



## Praying for the Enemy

Recently I asked the children in one of our schools what they would like to pray about. It didn't come as much of a surprise that the word on all their lips was "Ukraine".

At their prompting we prayed for peace, for safety, for food to eat and water to drink. All very much as I would perhaps have expected.

But then, out of the silence, the voice of a child aged 7 piped up: "Lord, please don't let the war get any bigger, as we don't want World War 3. Amen."

Amen, indeed. For me this was a truly heart-stopping moment; reinforcing how much this terrible and pitiless war - taking place more than 1,500 miles away - is affecting us and touching all of us personally. From a standing start it has come to dominate our thoughts and prayers; even those of a 7-year old child in rural East Lancashire.

Noticeably absent from their prayers, however, was one set of people, people who need our prayers as much as anyone else. And those are the aggressors – by which I don't just mean the Russian soldiers, sailors and airmen but also their leaders, their Generals and Admirals and, yes, even President Putin himself.

Praying for our enemies and those who persecute us is never an easy ask. I doubt many of the early Christians were praying for Saul as he 'breath[ed] threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord' (Acts 9.1).

In particular, Ananias was rather taken aback when instructed by God to lay his hands on a man who had done 'much evil' (v13). And yet not only does our Lord tell us to do just this, but He leads us by example. Just think of the comfort He brought to the criminal hanging next to him on Golgotha.

Back in the darkest days of World War 2, CS Lewis tackled the issue head on saying: "When you pray for Hitler and Stalin, how do you actually teach yourself to make the prayer real?"

Lewis suggested there were two things that helped him. First, he constantly remembered in praying we are 'only joining our feeble little voice' to the ever-lasting involvement of Christ, 'who died for those very men'.

Because we can be in no doubt that Christ is there; he is not simply standing back, watching cruelties being inflicted from afar. He's there in the bombed-out cellars of Mariupol; the shattered hospitals of Kyiv and Kharkiv; He's bringing comfort to the wounded, the dying, the homeless and the dispossessed.

It was for this very purpose – to share our pain and ease our suffering – that God took on human form and suffered the cruellest of deaths on the cross. And in rising from the grave on the first Easter morning, He gave us hope to sustain us through the darkest of days.

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

Secondly, Lewis faced up to the uncomfortable truth that each and every one of us has the ability to be cruel and to sin. He argued that, under different circumstances, any of us might have developed into 'something terrible' – another Stalin, a Hitler, a Putin.

He concluded that, at bottom, we are not 'so different from these ghastly creatures'. It's a truly sobering thought that, in praying for our enemies, we are also praying for ourselves and what we might have become, had things been different.

**Rev. David Hargreaves,  
Curate of Barrowford St Thomas and Newchurch-in-Pendle St Mary**