

Sermon: 27th February 2022

Luke 1: 67 - 80

Praying for Failure

Today, it is necessary to talk about imprecatory prayer. Deliberately praying for something to fail. We have all watched the violent scenes reported in real time from Ukraine. We are watching war unfold; not a cold war, not a hybrid war, but a traditional war, where men take arms into the streets and fight block by block, where women gather to make munitions, Molotov Cocktails to aid the defence of their cities, and where children take refuge in the Metro systems below ground.

Against so great a wickedness, you may feel, as I do, that our words are powerless and pathetic. How on earth do we begin to pray into a situation so complex, and so evil? And yet we must. As members of the church, it is OK to be afraid, it is not OK to be silent. The Church must find her voice and speak clearly in condemnation. Our usual posture in prayer, is to seek God's blessing and this is right. But there are times, such as this, where we must turn to God and specifically ask that he causes certain things to fail. This is our prayer against the Putin regime, that it would fail. In the last few days, I have found myself praying the following points:

- That the Russian Military and police forces would challenge rather than obey their orders. That they would not delay in this as their predecessors did in the days of Stalin.
- That God's blessing would be richly poured out on the people of Russia, that he would foment in their hearts a spirit of protest, to take to the streets with ever greater courage and numbers to protest the war.
- That the internet would be a tool for good in the world, in spreading truth, and not lies or disinformation.
- That God would equip the Ukrainian church to meet the spiritual and practical needs stirred by the escalating violence. That it might endure the storm to come.
- That the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox church might not simply express a tepid sympathy for the dispossessed, but condemnation for the regime that has caused it.

These have been my prayers over the last few days. I am sure you have made similar intercessions.

It is noteworthy, that our reading today, is the prayer of Zechariah. It is the prayer of an old priest over the child he never thought he would never have. And as such, his is a prayer of thankfulness, and of consecration. Thankfulness and consecration. Thankfulness that God does and has intervened in human affairs to rescue, to save and to restore. And a prayer of consecration, that his own son might point to the Christ, who forgives sin, and shines on

those who dwell in darkness. Why is it then, that many Christians around the world pray this prayer every single day?

- 1) It is a reminder firstly, that God has intervened in the affairs of this world, not in might, or strength of arms, or in the threat of violence, but through his one and only Son, Jesus Christ.
- 2) And secondly, to speak over ourselves the ministry of John the Baptist, that we might point to Christ in all things.

To pray this prayer is to utter a thanksgiving: God is at work in the world. It is also a prayer of consecration, we are set the task of being witnesses in the world. As we pray this prayer in light of all that is unfolding in Ukraine, we give thanks that God has, and does, intervene in human affairs through his Son Jesus Christ – and we seek to discern how we can point to Jesus in our witness, as violence grips the east. We pray for the failure of Putin’s regime. We do so knowing that God has intervened in human affairs through his only Son Jesus Christ, and we therefore ask ourselves, how we might point to Christ in all things as we head into an uncertain future?

Let us move into a time of silence as we lift up this situation to the Lord, in words that only our inner most spirit can voice.

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Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel,
who has come to his people and set them free.

2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour,
born of the house of his servant David.

3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old
to save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all that hate us,

4 To show mercy to our ancestors,
and to remember his holy covenant.

5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham:
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,

6 Free to worship him without fear,
holy and righteous in his sight
all the days of our life.

7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,

8 To give his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of all their sins.

9 In the tender compassion of our God
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.