

# From the Vicarage....

Dear Friends

We are fast approaching Easter which falls in the middle of April this year. Easter is a season all about hope and I really wanted to find some hopeful words to share with you this month. The trouble is that I am writing this in March, just over three weeks since the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces, and I am not feeling very hopeful.

We have watched with disbelief and horror as the Russian invasion of Ukraine has unfolded. We have seen through the extensive news coverage the brutal destruction of Ukraine's homes, hospitals, schools and towns and the human suffering wrought on innocent civilians, many of them women and children. We see bewilderment and fear on the faces of the displaced and our hearts are broken for what is lost and threatened. We are uncertain how best we can help as refugees in their millions pour out of Ukraine into neighbouring countries and thousands of others prepare to flee taking only what they can carry to safety. Others remain trapped praying that invading Russian forces will open humanitarian corridors to provide a safe way out.

The plight of the Ukrainian people is part of the ongoing story of humanity's inhumanity as people of power and tyranny battle to keep the upper hand. Every time this situation happens in our world we cry out with horror and vow that it must never happen again and yet, even with the refugee crises in Syria and Afghanistan still fresh in our minds we find another humanitarian disaster unfolding.

How can we respond to what is happening?

We can, of course give generously of our money and practical help to send supplies of humanitarian aid to Ukraine and countries receiving refugees.

We may soon be in the situation of being able to open our homes to displaced individuals and families but sometimes all we can do is pray.

But prayer can be hard. Sometimes it is hard to see where a loving God is in all of this.

But I believe God hears our prayers and weeps with the people of Ukraine because God has seen humanity inflict suffering so many times before.

The Bible is full of the stories of people fleeing into exile in foreign lands. Even Jesus' parents knew the fear of being a refugee as they fled with their baby to Egypt from king Herod. And Jesus knew what it was like to be tortured and killed by those who thought he was a threat. Perhaps Jesus is closer than we think.

The Easter story is one of suffering and death for Jesus, a man of peace and love and because Jesus trod that road to the cross he understands the human suffering of each Ukrainian soul and walks beside them today.

Each Easter we remember that Jesus, despite his suffering and death rose from the dead to new life. Ultimately the Easter story ends with triumph that love and hope prevails, that good conquers evil.

The Easter story tells us that hope is stronger than despair, that love is stronger than hate, that peace is stronger than war and that life is stronger than death.