

Newsletter 42

As we continue to receive news of the devastating situation in Ukraine, we continue to pray for the people whose lives have been so badly affected. Last Friday, German Community of the Cross of Nails Chair Oliver Schuegraf spoke thoughtfully about his view of the situation in Ukraine. His 'Thought for the Week' is attached. If you have a computer, you can also see a video of Oliver delivering his thoughts and a prayer by clicking the link below:

<http://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/ccn/tftw/thought-for-the-week-for-4th-march-a-prayer-for-ukraine-as-war-enters-its-second-week-from-oliver-schuegraf/>

A quote from Oliver's article:

"Injustice and aggression must be clearly called by their names. We must confront both without hating the aggressors. That is what Provost Howard has taught us."*

*(*provost of Coventry Cathedral in 1940)*

This month's **Litany of Reconciliation** will be led by Mike Morton-Thorpe at 12 noon on Thursday 17th March on the grass outside Holy Trinity Church – *Please note the new venue. This will also be a time for us to pray for peace in Ukraine.*

In our parish, if you wish to donate money, we have a collection plate at the back of Holy Trinity and it will be sent off to the **Disasters Emergency Committee's Ukraine appeal.**

Lent appeal – there is also a plate to donate to our chosen charity, Sheffield: City of Sanctuary. As we heard from inspiring speaker Blessan Babu at our Shrove Tuesday Lent appeal launch, they support refugees who come to our city, and in due course, this will include refugees from Ukraine.

A message from Chris Wrigley:

"The Grace Foodbank - Thank you all so much for your very kind donations to the Foodbank over the last few months and especially at Christmas time. The need for foodbanks has increased over the last years and this is often seen on television reports; the situation is no less difficult here in Sheffield. The winter season is always a period of great need and even more so, when the clients of the Foodbank have also to cope with the problems caused by Covid.

The demands on the Grace Foodbank continue and we can only guess how this year will progress once the increase in fuel charges apply!

With God's Blessing,
Chris Wrigley"

Services for March: Please note changes due to reordering work at St. John's:

13 March 10 am at Holy Trinity – Matthew Rhodes will preach and preside

20 March 10am at Holy Trinity – Emma Percy will preach and preside

27 March 10am at St. John's Church Hall – Mothering Sunday, led by our parish team

With warm wishes

Angie

Article by Oliver Schuegraf:

There is a war waging in the middle of Europe. Most of us probably never thought that one day we would have to utter this sentence. In Europe, cities are being bombed, people are being shelled, civilians are dying. The population is seeking shelter in sub-way stations; almost a million refugees have already made their way to find refuge in Hungary or Poland.

There is a war waging the middle of Europe. What seemed unthinkable for so long has become real. And I, like probably many, feel perplexed and absolutely helpless. I have not done military service; I did community service instead. "War is contrary to the will of God" – this is what the World Council of Churches had urgently formulated in 1948. This should also apply to me as a prospective theology student, I thought then. And now? Arms supplies and rearmament suddenly seem to be the order of the day. Can that be?

War is contrary to the will of God – What does that mean today for me, for us as Community of the Cross of Nails as we are striving for reconciliation, peace, and international understanding? Can there be peace without resolutely confronting and stopping the aggressor? I would so much like to know how this can be done. But I am perplexed. I am a conscientious objector, yet I admire all those Ukrainians who defend the independence and freedom of their country, even with weapons.

In the last weeks Coventry has been in contact with Anastasya from Saint Pauls, our Cross of Nails' partner in Odessa. Anastasya was grateful that the Community of the Cross of Nails is showing its solidarity with Odessa. She asked that we pray for her parish and for peace in the hearts of the people. Unfortunately, we have not heard from her since the war began.

I cannot get out of my mind the Bible verse with which the Litany of Reconciliation begins: All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All have sinned. We become guilty where wars leave us cold just because they are far away. And we need to reflect openly and honestly how we, the seemingly uninvolved, have contributed that war is waging in Europa again. But even though we are all not blameless in this conflict, not all sin is equal. Reconciliation and peace must go hand in hand with justice. You cannot have one without the other. Injustice and aggression must be clearly called by their names. We must confront both without hating the aggressors. That is what Provost Howard has taught us.

But I remain perplexed as to how justice and peace are to come together. Forgiveness and reconciliation are perhaps too big words for the moment. But how do we start with small steps? Where can dialogue emerge, where is the space for people to come together so that peace and reconciliation might get a chance again?

What remains for the moment? Where to put my speechlessness? It helps me to know that over the centuries people have turned to God in their helplessness. Especially in the Psalms, people have not minced their words and have bitterly complained to God about their abandonment:

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me for ever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? (Ps 13)

But I also hear in the Psalms: Come, behold the works of the Lord; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. (Ps 46)

We bring our helplessness before God and include in our intercessions Anastasya, Pastor Alexander Gross, and the entire Saint Paul's parish in Odessa, but also the Cross of Nails partners in Russia and Belarus: The Lutheran Church of the Resurrection in Kaliningrad, St. Andrew's Anglican Church in Moscow, St. Catherine's Lutheran Church in St. Petersburg, the Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Volgograd, and the International Conference Centre IBB in Minsk.

So we pray:

Almighty and merciful God, you are a God of peace. You have promised us a world where swords are forged into ploughshares, where people no longer learn to wage war.

In Jesus Christ you gave peace. His way is a way of gentleness, non-violence, and reconciliation, even to the cross. He is our peace.

God, we lament war and terror in many countries on this earth. We lament to you the suffering and violence that people experience. We lament the senseless deaths.

God, we bring before you the war in Ukraine and our fear and bewilderment. We ask you that the war-mongers find their way back to the power of dialogue and no longer rely on the language of weapons. We pray that wisdom and the will for peace is stronger than self-assertion and power.

God, we think of our brothers and sisters in faith and of all the people in Ukraine who are suffering under the war. We also think of the people and Cross of Nails partners in Belarus and Russia. We know that we Christians should be one in Christ, our peace. Make us to instruments of your peace in this time. Amen.

Oliver Schuegraf

Chair of the German Community of the Cross of Nails

Recent Sermon

27 February 2022

Transfiguration

Exodus 34.29-end

2 Cor. 3.12-4.2

Luke 9.28-36

The word 'transfiguration' is defined as 'a complete change of form or appearance into a more beautiful or spiritual state.' 'Transfigure' is defined as 'to transform into something more beautiful and elevated.' To be transfigured, then, is to be changed—changed for the better.

In their different ways, our readings today all show the power of God and Christ to effect a change for the better in our own lives and in the lives of others. After his encounter with God on Mount Sinai, Moses' face shone, so much so that he was obliged to cover his face upon coming down from the mountain and rejoining his people. During Jesus' Transfiguration, his appearance changed, and his divinity was revealed to the disciples. Of course, Jesus can also make a change in our own lives in turn, affirmed by Paul in the Corinthians reading, in which he explains that the veil of blindness and unbelief can be taken away from Jew and Gentile alike, enabling Christ to bring about something more beautiful and elevated in us.

Following on from these readings, then, let us contemplate the power of Christ to effect a transfiguration in our own lives.

We see in the Gospel reading how Jesus speaks with Moses and Elijah 'about his departure, which he was going to fulfil at Jerusalem.' In his commentary on this passage, Tom Wright explains how the Greek word Luke uses for 'departure' is *exodus*, then describes the different senses in which Luke is using the word. In one sense, Luke is using 'exodus' to mean *leaving to go on a journey*, since Jesus will leave the mountain of transfiguration to go to Jerusalem. But Tom Wright explains that the connection Luke wants his readers to make is between an old and new exodus: in the original exodus, Moses led an exodus out of Egypt and a life of slavery into the promised land. And in the new exodus, Christ would lead his followers out of a life of sin and death into a new life.

So we have the opportunity for a new life, for our old lives to be transformed and transfigured into something beautiful, to be truly changed. However, we have to be willing to go on this exodus, this journey away from sin and death, with Christ. And in order to do that, we have first to be prepared to see ourselves for who we really are. Once we do so, Christ can transform and transfigure us.

Some people may believe or pretend they don't need to be changed and transformed.

Other people may have a very different reaction, being all too aware of their failings and shortcomings, feeling that Christ's job will be too great to effect the change in their lives which is needed. Earlier in his Gospel, Luke tells us how, when Peter first met Christ and saw and felt his power, his first response was to implore Christ to leave: 'Depart from me; for I

am a sinful man, O Lord.’ In His grace and mercy, though, Jesus didn’t leave; instead, he transformed Peter, who followed Him and accomplished glorious things—things that Peter would never have thought himself capable of.

And so, whatever our shortcomings, like Peter we can experience our own Transfiguration. Christ first shows us Himself, and then ourselves, with all our faults. He shows us who He is, who we are, and then finally who and what we can be, with His help.

This process of realization—of who we are, and who we can be, through the transformative power of Christ—may happen quickly or slowly. In the Gospel reading, Peter, James, and John see Christ’s glory in an instant, as soon as they wake up; and in the Corinthians reading, Paul also talks about a sudden revelation. Paul says that when those who were metaphorically blind—or in denial of the power of Christ—‘turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.’ Another beautifully poetic way of describing this moment is by saying ‘the scales fell from their eyes,’ which is what happened both literally and metaphorically to Paul—or Saul as he then was, persecutor of Christians until his own conversion. We read about his conversion in the book of Acts. Blinded by Christ as he was travelling on the road to Damascus, Saul is led by his travel companions into the city and waits there for three days, remaining blind. After three days, a Christian called Ananias is told by the Lord to go to Saul and lay his hands upon him. Here is how Luke describes what happened:

So Ananias...entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized [...] And in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’ (Acts 9.17-20)

So, like Saul, when we become a Christian, when we are transfigured, the scales fall from our eyes. We come to see things as they really are. We see our lives in a different way—and what we see may not be a pretty sight. We might see a life where our priorities are all wrong. We may see selfishness, pride—any number of things we need to change. Speaking about the contrast between Christ and us, William Barclay explains that Jesus always asked: ‘What does *God* wish me to do?’, while ‘we nearly always ask: ‘What do *I* want to do?’. So we see the need to be transfigured, just as Christ was transfigured. We’re transfigured; and like Saul, we’re converted.

But what then? We change. And we show the world we’ve changed in and through our behaviour. We minister.

Bearing witness: showing the world we’ve changed

We see from all three accounts of the Transfiguration in the Gospels that Peter wants to prolong the mountain top experience, to savour the profoundly spiritual experience of being in close communion with God. But all three Gospel writers immediately follow their account of the Transfiguration with Jesus and the disciples descending the mountain to be met by desperate pleas for help from the father of a child tormented by a demon. Neither Jesus nor his disciples could stay on the mountain communing with God for ever; their mission was to take Christ into the world, preaching, healing, and doing good works.

In the same way, after our own experiences of transfiguration and conversion, we are sent out to walk with Christ in our daily lives, and to minister to the world, with the help of the Holy Spirit and in the power of Christ.

Closing prayers

So, transfiguration... Then conversion... Then ministry.

I'd like to close with two short prayers to help us ask Christ to enact his Transfiguration in our hearts, and then to walk with us and act through us in our daily lives.

For the first prayer, I've taken some words from St. Patrick's Breastplate:

Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me.
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

And here is the second closing prayer:

God our Father, may the light of faith illumine our hearts and shine in our words and deeds.

May Christ transfigure our hearts, our lives, our words, and our deeds.
Amen.