

Baby born in metro station in Kyiv & the Canaanite woman

Introduction



On the front page of your bulletin you can see the photo of a Ukrainian mother fleeing their home town Kyiv with her child. They sit in a train compartment & look out a fogged-up window. They start a journey into the unknown... They leave behind, as thousands of them do, fathers, brothers, uncles, grandparents, friends. Those staying behind are fighting for the freedom of their home country. Those fleeing run for their lives...

Let me begin this reflection with...

A Call to Peace

We declare together, oh God,
with hearts breaking, eyes weeping and souls stirring:
We will stand and cry and weep with our brothers and sisters in Ukraine and other war torn parts of the world.
We will make a place of peace for even the enemies at our table.
We will open our doors and our hearts to those who enter them.
We will seek to forgive as we have been forgiven.
We will love in Jesus' name because you taught us that love conquers all. Amen.

Stories count more than tanks

More than two weeks into the war, it seems increasingly likely that Vladimir Putin is heading towards a historic defeat. He may win all the battles but still lose the war. Putin's dream of rebuilding the Russian empire has always rested on the lie that Ukraine isn't a real nation, that Ukrainians aren't a real people, and that the

inhabitants of Kyiv, Kharkiv and Lviv yearn for Moscow's rule. That's a complete lie – Ukraine is a nation with more than a thousand years of history, and Kyiv was already a major metropolis when Moscow was not even a village. But the Russian despot has told his lie so many times that he apparently believes it himself.

When planning his invasion of Ukraine, Putin could count on many known facts. He knew that militarily Russia dwarfs Ukraine. He knew that Nato would not send troops to help Ukraine. He knew that European dependence on Russian oil and gas would make countries like Germany hesitate about imposing stiff sanctions. Based on these known facts, his plan was to hit Ukraine hard and fast, decapitate its government, establish a puppet regime in Kyiv, and ride out the western sanctions.

But there was one big unknown about this plan. As the Americans learned in Iraq and the Soviets learned in Afghanistan, it is much easier to conquer a country than to hold it. Putin knew he had the power to conquer Ukraine. But would the Ukrainian people just accept Moscow's puppet regime? Putin gambled that they would.

With each passing day, it is becoming clearer that Putin's gamble is failing. The Ukrainian people are resisting with all their heart, winning the admiration of the entire world – and winning the war. Many dark days lie ahead. The Russians may still conquer the whole of Ukraine. But to win the war, the Russians would have to hold Ukraine, and they can do that only if the Ukrainian people let them. This seems increasingly unlikely to happen.

Each Russian tank destroyed and each Russian soldier killed increases the Ukrainians' courage to resist. And each Ukrainian killed deepens the Ukrainians' hatred of the invaders. Hatred is the ugliest of emotions. But for oppressed nations, hatred is a hidden treasure. Buried deep in the heart, it can sustain resistance for generations. To reestablish the Russian empire, Putin needs a relatively bloodless victory that will lead to a relatively hateless occupation. By spilling more and more Ukrainian blood, Putin is making sure his dream will never be realised.

Nations are ultimately built on stories. Each passing day adds more stories that Ukrainians will tell not only in the dark days ahead, but in the decades and generations to come. The president who refused to flee the capital, telling the US that he needs ammunition, not a ride to safety. This is the stuff nations are built from. In the long run, these stories count for more than tanks.

The stories of Ukrainian bravery give resolve not only to the Ukrainians, but to the whole world. They give courage to the governments of European nations, to the US administration, and even to the oppressed citizens of Russia. If Ukrainians dare to stop a tank with their bare hands, the German government can dare to supply them with some anti-tank missiles, the US government can dare to cut Russia off Swift, and Russian citizens can dare to demonstrate their opposition to this senseless war.

We can all be inspired to dare to do something, whether it is making a donation, welcoming refugees, or helping with the struggle online. The war in Ukraine will shape the future of the entire world. If tyranny and aggression are allowed to win, we will all suffer the consequences. There is no point to remain just observers. It's time to stand up and be counted.

Unfortunately, this war is likely to be long-lasting. Taking different forms, it may well continue for years. But the most important issue has already been decided. The last few days have proved to the entire world that Ukraine is a very real nation, that Ukrainians are a very real people, and that they definitely don't want to live under a new Russian empire. The main question left open is how long it will take for this message to penetrate the head of Putin. (Daily Telegraph 4 March 2022)

When I read the following newspaper article, I knew which Bible story to choose for today...

Baby born in metro station as 23-year-old mother shelters from Russian bombardment:

Mia was born just before 8:30pm after officers heard her mother's screams and rushed to help.

A 23-year-old woman has given birth to a baby girl in a Kyiv metro station while sheltering from Russian bombs in what has been called a "beacon of hope".

Mia was born just before 8.30pm on Friday after others in the station heard her mother's screams and rushed to help deliver her.

An ambulance was later called to take them to hospital. Both mother and baby are said to be doing well.

People sheltering alongside the mother have called the delivery a "beacon of hope".

A witnessing woman said Mia was born in a "stressful environment" amid heavy bombing, but that the mother is "happy after this challenging birth".

She posted moving pictures showing the newborn clutching her mother's hand. (inews 27 Feb 2022)

Bible Story

And here is the story of the Canaanite Woman who did everything she could to save her little daughter's life... With her bravery she overcomes hostility, boundaries, obstructions, national and cultural barriers, & role stereotypes to show the world a new way of life... may we all learn from her hope, her persistence and her love for life. May we stand up for freedom, peace, justice and democracy as she stood up for her child.

The Canaanite Woman

My little girl had an answer for everything.

I'd say, "Time for bed, Becky."

"But I am not tired," Becky would say.

"You'll be by the time you've had your bath and your story."

"I might not be."

"I think you will. Bed, Becky!"

"But it's still daylight."

"That's because it is summer. Bed now, or there won't be time for a story."

"Oh mother! Not fair!"

She had a lot of questions too. Most of them began "Why?" or "Why not?" and I didn't always have answers.

Her grandmother got so cross! She'd tell Becky to do as she was told and not answer back. If Becky asked, "Why is the sky blue?" she'd say, "Because it is!"

But I loved it – I loved the way Becky asked and thought and worked things out.

The day she fell ill it just looked as if she had been in the sun too long. I brought her indoors, into the shade, and sponged her down. But she didn't cool down. Her skin was burning to touch and as dry as brushwood. We bathed her and gave her cooling drinks that she didn't want to take, but nothing worked.

My husband, coming back from his work at the harbour, said that there was a famous Jewish rabbi staying at the white house near the sea.

"What's a Jewish rabbi doing anywhere around Sidon?" said mother.

"Trying to get some peace and quiet," he said, "but I wonder if he could help our Becky? He's supposed to be a healer. A miracle man, that kind of healer. His name is Jesus of Nazareth, and he healed a woman in..."

"He's Jewish and we're not," interrupted my mother. "He's not going to help us, is he? Why would he?"

Becky was ill, so I had to do the arguing for her. Why wouldn't he? I ran from the house.

"He won't help us!" my mother called after me. "His God isn't our god!"

"I don't want a god," I thought. "I want Becky. Run, run, run, keep running." I ran all the way to the white house, and I must have been shouting out for help as I came nearer, because somebody opened the door. My legs wouldn't hold me up any more and I stumbled to the ground at the rabbi's feet.

"Please, sir," I gasped out, "my little girl – Becky – she's dying. Please will you come and help her?"

He looked at me, saying nothing at all. The crowd drew back to give him space. Because I was on my knees, he knelt too, to talk to me, but in his eyes I didn't see

what I wanted. I wanted to see somebody who knew the right thing to do and do it. But he just looked sad.

“Daughter,” he said, “I can’t help you. God sent me to help my own people, and they need so much from me. I can’t go to everyone else too. It would be like taking the children’s bread and throwing it to the dogs.”

The dogs? Do you think I was angry? Or insulted? Or hurt? I didn’t have time to be! Becky was all that mattered, and she would have an answer for him. What would Becky say? I thought of Becky’s kind of answer.

“But if you had a dog, and the children dropped crumbs under the table,” I said, “you’d let the dogs eat the crumbs, wouldn’t you? So what about giving us the crumbs?”

I watched his face. His eyes crinkled at the corners as he smiled. “You have real faith!” he said. “Go home! Your child is well!”

I said thank you... I ran home to find Becky as bright as a button, out of bed and drinking pomegranate juice.

Years later, Becky came home and told me she’d joined a group of Jesus’ followers – or “Followers of the Way”, as they called themselves.

“The way to where?” I asked her and she laughed.

“The way to peace,” she said. “Come with us, and share with us bread and wine!” (inspired by Margaret McAllister, Women of the Bible).

Silence

The world is longing for peace – God’s peace – the peace Jesus can give... Let us try and imagine this peace as we remain a few moments in silence...

Hymn: Peace I give to you... TS 428