Transfiguring Dread to Hope

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Luke 9: 28-36 Russell Mitchell-Walker

This past week many of us are probably experiencing a variety of emotions with the challenging news of Russia invading Ukraine. We may feel fear and anxiety, hopeless and powerless, anger and dread. We feel concern for our Ukrainian friends and if you are Ukrainian you may feel this attack personally on your family, your culture, your homeland, even if you have never been there. We hold one another in these feelings, knowing we are not alone. We may find ourselves wishing for a violent response against President Vladimir Putin, and the Russian Army, however, that also brings dread and fear of the kind of response such action may bring. Many of us realize that Putin may not hesitate to use nuclear weapons, which would be disastrous. So we draw on prayer and hope for sanity to return to the world, knowing that violence only breeds more violence.

As we experience these feelings, some of them would have been similar to what Jesus experienced as he went up the mountain with Peter, James and John to pray. He knows that he needs to head to Jerusalem where he will face suffering and death. He is probably afraid and filled with dread as well. And so he prays, as he so often does in his ministry, which often leads to great epiphanies, healings or preaching. This time, he has an experience of being transfigured with light and God’s glory, then finds himself in the presence of Moses and Elijah, great prophets of the Old Testament. The disciples he was with, who were tired and sleepy, probably just starting to close their eyes when a dazzling brightness brings them to attentiveness and wakes them up fully. Jesus has a conversation with Moses and Elijah about his impending ordeal in Jerusalem and probably receives support, encouragement and hope from these ancestors.

Jesus then has the courage and fortitude to continue. He is attentive to the journey ahead including the suffering. [Tracey Cochran](http://www.dailygood.org/story/1518/in-the-midst-of-winter-an-invincible-summer-tracy-cochran/) of the *Daily Good, News that Inspires* blog writes about suffering:

“In Buddhism, a definition of faith is the ability to keep our hearts open in the darkness of the unknown. The root of the word patience is a Latin verb for “suffer,” which in the ancient sense meant to hold, not to grasp but to bear, to tolerate without pushing away. Being patient doesn’t mean being passive. It means being attentive, willing to be available to what is happening, going on seeing, noticing how things change. When we aren’t wishing for something to be over, or when we aren’t freezing around an idea about what it is we are seeing, we see and hear more.”

Jesus was patient, attentive to what he needed to do and endure. He was responsive to his situation and those around him, knowing the consequences of standing for what he knew was right. The disciple’s experience on the mountaintop, of God’s voice telling them to listen to Jesus, God’s son, affirms that what he has recently shared with them about his suffering at the hands of the Romans, and all the other messages of love and justice are right and true. This shocks and empowers them for the journey ahead. In the initial shock they didn’t know what to do with the experience, Peter, babbling on about building booths to honour the spot, not wanting to leave it. Jesus redirected him from that notion, although the church later did build a church on the so-called spot where the transfiguration was to have taken place.

So Jesus and the disciples were encouraged to endure and embrace the journey they were to embark on, in spite of the fear and dread. May we too draw on that same hope and strength to endure this time together. We are not alone, God is with us, and we are all in this together and need to support one another as we have in the last two years. For those of us who are not touched personally by these events, reach out to those you know who are Ukrainian, and ask them how they are doing. If, as someone with Ukrainian descent, you need support, reach out to those you know to receive it. We need to hold onto hope and stand in solidarity the best we can. We can gain hope from the resilience of the people, like the Russian people protesting the war in the streets, risking arrest, and the [older woman](https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2022/feb/25/ukrainian-woman-sunflower-seeds-russian-soldiers-video#:~:text=A%20woman%20is%20being%20hailed,a%20metre%20from%20the%20soldier.) challenging a Russian Soldier to go home, naming him as an occupier and offering him sunflower seeds to put in his pocket (the national flower of Ukraine) so they will grow and bloom if he died there on Ukrainian soil. I share this reflection on How to Help Ukraine offered by [Valarie Kaur](https://valariekaur.com/2022/02/how-to-help-ukraine/), author of See No Stranger, which I and others have found helpful.

My loves,

I have been breathless watching the terror in Ukraine unfold. Russia’s invasion comes in the midst of nearly a decade of escalating tension, violence, and antagonization. Since 2014, at least 14,000 lives have been claimed as the result of Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea and persistent military presence.

**To the people of Russia:** We see you marching in the streets, risking arrest, bearing the cold, and holding your signs high: NO WAR. Your courage is a beacon. You show the world that Russia’s leadership is not Russia’s people. Only you have the power to stop this war at the source. Keep going!

**To the people of Ukraine:** We see you — waking to the sound of sirens, pulling your children from the windows, and preparing to protect all you love. We tremble with you, and wail with you. You are not alone. We are rising up in solidarity and sending you our prayers, our action, and our aid.

**To the children of Ukraine:** When I told my son about you, he wanted to send you our prayer Tati Vao Na Lagi. My grandfather sang this as a soldier in World War II. When German air raids came at night, he slept on the ground and imagined this Sikh prayer as his shield. So tonight, we closed our eyes and sang his prayer for you. We imagined a shimmering gold shield around your homes and your families and you. The prayer means: “The hot winds cannot touch you, you are shielded by Love.”

**And so, I ask all of us:**

What if we made a shield of love?

What if this was the moment an unprecedented number of people around the world stood against war? What if we shifted collective consciousness so that never again would any government win support to start a war? What if our voices and songs and actions flooded Russia and Ukraine now, bringing aid and courage and change?

We can choose to see no stranger — to see the people of Ukraine as our family, and the soldiers of Russia as lost ones who can be called home. We can let that sight shape how we grieve — and what we do. Each of us has a role.

Just remember, my love, we are tired and wired and stressed from pandemic and injustice. Now, war. So breathe and rest before you push, read and learn before you respond. Revolutionary love is not the sacrifice of an individual, but the practice of a community. Together, courage.

Breathe and rest before you push, read and learn before you respond. Watch for ways we can respond and support from our National Church. We are community together, and together, have power in love. May that love be revolutionary in its non-violence and solidarity as we move through this time. Amen.