

I am a baby Anglican.

As many of you know, my experience of Anglican things is quite limited, so I always come to Lent with a lot of intrigue and interest. When a Baptist I had heard of it and even followed the lectionary for the season, but I have realised that that is not the same as following lent in an Anglican parish, even in Covid times.

On Ash Wednesday we joined with Cityside Baptist to mark the beginning of the season. As Stu the Baptist Minister and I were talking after the service, he commented on how good it was to be “doing this” in an Anglican church. Somehow, he said, “it seemed right.”

When I first went to Howick, I was struck by an introduction written in the liturgy booklet we used for Lent services. In it, it said, “This is a day for new beginnings with God, for putting aside the sins and failures of the past and beginning afresh.”

I am a person who needs fresh starts, I need to put away my sins and failures. I am a person who lives for a new beginning. If there is one thing I know, it’s that I’m a sinner, and the season of lent helps me to wrestle and address that.

But with all that is happening in the world today, with Covid, a fracturing of society over what is real and what is not, and the place of democracy in our time. I find more than my own sins clogging my thought processes, similar to grating pizza dough, thinking soon comes to a sticky end.

Like the horrors taking place in Ukraine at the moment.

What do our readings for today say to us in all this?

“Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come buy and eat!” I wonder how starving and frightened Ukrainians, mainly members of the Eastern Orthodox church, feel as Russians, mainly members of the Russian Orthodox church, bomb them. I wonder how they read this?

What does it mean to be “Ambassador’s for Christ” in this situation? What does it mean, that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself”?

In the context of the world as we see it today, what is the Prodigal Son or Waiting Father about?

What does Lent have to say to us in today’s world?

I don’t know what these readings say to the people of Mariupol, when you thirst and there is no water, when you hunger and there is no bread.

All I can do is hope, that the one who stands behind these texts, stands behind them, in their hour of need.

The readings seem to say that being Christian in name only, is not really good enough, to be an Ambassador for Christ means there must be some out working in life. How can one country with a mainly Christian population bomb another? How is that loving your neighbour?

They seem to say that in spite of all of the progress we think we have made, we are back on the outskirts of Eden, watching Cain kill Abel, because of anger over the Lord's regard, and that we are sinners to the very core of our beginnings ... and our beings.

They seem to say that only when we truly turn to Christ, in "whom God reconciled the world," ... and love our neighbour, no matter who they are ... will any of this work.

They seem to say that in spite of all the evil he has unleashed on the world, Vladimir Putin is not beyond redemption. That no matter how low we get, or bad the things we have done, there is always a way back, and God is waiting.

And lent certainly says to us, and all the world," That now is a day for new beginnings with God, for putting aside the sins and failures of the past and beginning afresh."

Would this message be heard in the halls of the Kremlin; the silos that house missiles, the cockpits of tanks, the tents of soldiers ... and make a difference in the streets of Kharkiv, the underground of Kyiv, the refugee camps multiplying in Poland, Romania and Moldova.

Would that the world might hear them ... "incline their ears and listen ... come to the one who reconciles the world to himself ... and live. That all may celebrate and rejoice, because what was dead will now be alive, what was lost would now be found. That everything would become new."

Ukrainian and Russian children singing and playing in Ukrainian streets. Wheat growing in its fields. People eating in its restaurants and cafes, laughing and enjoying themselves, ... people living. People ... at peace.

In the midst of all that is happening in the world at the moment, putting into practise the message of Lent, is one way we can help.

Not just Ukraine, but the world ... as it's lost its way, at the start of the 21st century.

It just seems right.

Amen.