

**Overcome Evil with Good**  
**Romans 12:9-21**

**February 27, 2022 Sermon by Rev. Alex Creager**

*<sup>9</sup> Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; <sup>10</sup> love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup> Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.*

*<sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. <sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." <sup>20</sup> No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

Like many of you these past four days, the nation of Ukraine, its leaders, and its people have been constantly on my mind. One image from the news that has stuck especially with me was of a Jewish synagogue in Odessa, a beautiful port city on the Black Sea. On Friday morning, its community leader, made a video right before evacuating. He said goodbye to this historic building, not knowing if he or the congregation will ever see it again. He shared that they would have to break the rules of the Sabbath in order to flee and find safety. They hoped to find it Moldova, much closer, but now were heading all the way to Poland, which would be a much longer, difficult journey. His ask, with tears in his eyes, for all those watching the video was to simply pray for their safety and rescue.

For us, an ocean away, we know war is raging and lives are being lost. We know hundreds of thousands are fleeing their homes, their communities, their churches and synagogues and houses of worship. We know parents are having to make the unfathomable decision of whether to flee with their children or fight for their country, a decision I can't begin to imagine.

For us in America, following along, we wonder, what can we do, how can we help, how can we respond in the face of such evil, such war, such suffering? In a time of such darkness and fear, is there anywhere to go for light?

I've been wondering that these past few days myself. And one passage has been on my mind more than any other. It is this one from Romans 12. In it Paul is speaking to people of faith who he knows may be facing injustice, persecution, loss of safety and life themselves. But he gives them these words of encouragement, of strength, and of how we as people of faith can respond in times of evil and darkness.

The first thing he tells us is that for love to be genuine and true, we must hate what is evil and hold fast to what is good. This week, I believe it is vitally important that truth be told. That we don't water down what is happening or excuse evil. As the church we need to be witnesses against war, against oppression, against evil and violence, and greed. And so speaking honestly and truthfully about what is happening is part of our calling of faith. There is something holy and good, encouraging and strengthening when people of faith all over the world speak up and share what is happening. And the last two days we have started to see that.

The two archbishops of the Anglican Church came out with a joint statement three days ago saying,

“The horrific and unprovoked attack on Ukraine is an act of great evil. Placing our trust in Jesus Christ, the author of peace, we pray for an urgent ceasefire and a withdrawal of Russian forces. We call for a public decision to choose the way of peace and an international conference to secure long term agreements for stability and lasting peace.”

And the Stated Clerk of our denomination, Presbyterian Church (USA) wrote:

“We are deeply saddened and shocked by Russia's military action in Ukraine. Russia's invasion violates international law and threatens to cause mass casualties and destruction, force millions to flee their homes and potentially trigger a catastrophic nuclear war. Russia has attacked a sovereign country to overthrow a legitimate government — a country that chose not to be a nuclear power. Europe has not seen such a military effort since World War II, a harbinger for a human catastrophe.

As members of the body of Christ, as people of faith, we lift our broken hearts in fervent prayer for peace in Ukraine. We have lived in hope over these weeks that war would not come, but it has. We join our voices with the global community, calling for an end to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. May the Russian army turn back to their borders and lay down their weapons, the tools of war.”

Speaking up for truth and goodness, and speaking against evil is our first step.

The second step that Paul invites us to do is to rejoice with those who are rejoicing and weep with those who weep. We live in a society that always tells us to be tough and not show emotions or grief. But this is a week where grief, and tears, and cries can be holy. Because they show love. They show concern. They show care and solidarity for our fellow human beings, our sisters and brothers across this globe.

The third step is to contribute to the needs of the saints and show hospitality. We are seeing in Poland and Czech Republic and a number eastern European nations, an open willingness to receive refugees with care and hospitality. We do not share a border with the Ukraine, but we may in the next weeks and months have ways to contribute to the needs, to support the work of charitable organizations and nations, and to even welcome refugees here at home in time. Right now, if you are looking for one place to give, I recommend International Rescue Committee, which has a long history of assisting refugees across the world.

The final invitation that Paul has for us today is maybe the biggest one all of us can take together. Prayer. "Persevere in prayer," Paul says. Yesterday, I was reminded that a huge chunk of our scripture was written to people of faith who were being invaded, losing homes, and about to be refugees and exiles. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Lamentations, 2 Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and a number of other prophets and Psalms were written to people for such a time as this. I am reminded by that that God is a God of the refugee. God is a God who cares for and mourns those who are victims of war. God is a God who wants peace and justice above bloodshed and power. And God continues to speak words of hope, of care, of love even in the darkest of times. God's light will still shine.

So this morning, I invite us to join in prayer:

Holy One of Peace, Love, and Truth,

We come to you this day,

Deeply saddened and outraged at what we are witnessing:

A democratically elected nation being invaded and attacked by their neighbors.

We pray this day for the people of Ukraine.

We ask that you keep its citizens safe and protected.

May you offer them strength, encouragement, and hope  
in this time of war and violence.

May your presence and love be with  
all the women, men, and children of this nation,  
as they face this fearful day.

We pray for their leaders, and the world leaders around the globe.

For their own safety, but also for wisdom and guidance in how to respond,  
to both work for freedom and dignity of human life.

We also pray for the people of Russia.

For the brave souls speaking out against war,  
give comfort and safety.

For the people who are simply trying to live their lives as peacefully as possible,  
guide them with compassion and care.

And even for their leaders,  
transform their hearts and minds to see their neighbors as you see them,  
valuing life and liberty, over power and control.

This day, O Lord, help us to know we are not alone,  
But that you are with us, at work in our world.  
Give us the courage and strength to face this day,  
with truth, with love,  
And with commitment to your true Kingdom of Peace  
for all people. Amen.