

**Words spoken by the Canon Malcolm Rogers,
Chaplain of St Andrew's Moscow
and Area Dean of Russia and Ukraine.
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Moscow is a very dark place to be in at the moment. Many Russians feel betrayed by their government who up to a week ago were saying that war was unthinkable, especially war with Ukraine – and that any talk of war was a western fabrication.

Of course, there are those who support the war, but when you control the media you control the stories that people hear. There is also a huge amount of fear

- like everyone, there is the fear of what happens if it all gets out of control, especially if there is a long conflict
- fear of what it means for the future of both Ukraine and Russia. One man said to me this afternoon, 'it is the return of totalitarianism'. And of course, people fear for the economy - of a return to the early 1980s.
- fear of total isolation from the West, of becoming a hated pariah people. More than a few have said that they are ashamed of being Russian.

There is also a great fear among the foreign community

- fear of the consequence of financial sanctions: as of this week it is almost impossible to get hold of any foreign currency - and some of our students from Indonesia and Sri Lanka find themselves now with no source of income.
- very real fear that we can't get out of the country as air routes and land routes are cut off – and that we will be trapped.

And so it is not surprising that there is a mass exodus.

And it does seem that a deep darkness – political, economic and military – has fallen on Ukraine and is falling on Russia.

The enemy we face is not political but supra-political.

We do not, as Christian believers, fight against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

And Jesus defeated those forces not by getting an army and crushing his enemy by force, not by blood taken – but by blood given.

He defeated the true enemy, the devil, with all his pride and hatred and bitterness, lies and fear and cruelty – by his obedience to His heavenly Father, by his sacrifice of himself, by his speaking the truth, by doing acts of service and by showing love.

The people of Ukraine and Russia showed the world living examples of that same love in the last century: the men and women who defeated communism not by civil disturbance, not by publicly protesting a totalitarian government who controlled them, but by simply persisting in meeting together to worship God and to pray for the coming Kingdom of God – in the face of terrible persecution.

Darkness has fallen on the people of Ukraine. They are walking through the valley of the shadow of death. Today, for them it is not the beginning of Lent. It is already Good Friday.

And that darkness is also falling on the people of Russia.

Thank you for praying for Ukraine. We weep with the wonderful community at Christ Church, Kyiv, and for their country

Pray too for the people of Russia, in so far as you can.

Many of them are broken. And the future is dark and scary.

We are followers of the crucified but risen Son of God.

We know that Good Friday was not the end.

Three days later Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

A new dawn will break on the people who walk in darkness and the shadow of death.

This is our hope. **Amen.**