



How ironic that in Holy Week this year our attention is so markedly fixed on the Middle East!

I have been thinking about the different Christian attitudes to war in different times and places. How Christians have practised non-resistance. How Christians have practised pacifism, allowing for acts of non-violent resistance. How Christians have also developed theories of just wars, although never believing warfare to be a virtuous activity. And finally, how some Christians have even justified warfare to prevent war.

But now there is a new category of warfare – the *"punching them while they're down, which is exactly how it should be"* category, spelt out by US Secretary of War Pete Henshaw in a Pentagon press briefing on the 4th March.

Last Sunday, Pope Leo, while celebrating Palm Sunday Mass at the Vatican, rejected this as a Christian attitude to war. *"Jesus is the King of Peace,"* he said, *"who rejects war, whom no one can use to justify war. He does not listen to the prayers of those who wage war, but rejects them,"* and he quoted Isaiah 1:15, *"When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood."*

Thinking about the Steve Garnaas-Holmes' poem I shared last week and on Sunday (I've included it again below), we can clearly see the actions and hear the rhetoric of *"the king [who] enters the city on his war horse"* in this current conflict, but I wonder, can we take the time to see (and shout 'Hosanna' when we do see) where *"love rides a donkey"* in what is happening in the Middle East at this time? Can we see the actions and listen for the voices of those whose *"hearts belong to love"*?

Perhaps it is in the actions of the Lebanese Baptist Church, and others, who are providing mattresses, blankets, clothes, milk and other essential items for some of the over 1.2 million people who have fled Southern Lebanon. Perhaps it is in our own response as we support them to do this. Baptist World Aid tell us, *"The number of displaced people is still rising, so if you'd like to give to help families survive, you can do so [here](#)."*

Perhaps it is in the faithful prayers of people in the Middle East and around the world.

On the 26th March the World Council of Churches held a special *Global Prayer for Peace* with prayers written by churches throughout the Middle East. They are beautiful prayers and extraordinarily faithful and hopeful prayers in these circumstances.

Here is the prayer prepared by the *Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Lands*.

O Lord, hope of all humanity, our faithful harbour, and giver of peace, we lift our prayers to You from a troubled world, and especially from the Holy Lands and the Middle East, where pain weighs heavily upon Your people, and hearts long for freedom, dignity, and peace.

Grant to the world love, peace, and unity. Silence wars and break the power of enmity. Let justice replace injustice, truth replace falsehood, and liberation overcome oppression. Send Your Holy Spirit and renew the face of our land. Break down the walls of fear and separation, remove the barriers that divide, and lead all people into the path of peace, that they may live side by side in dignity and harmony.

We pray for all who suffer—for the grieving, the displaced, the wounded, for all who live under fear and uncertainty, and for all those whose bodies and souls bear the lasting scars of war. Be their comfort, their strength, and their hope.

Draw us closer to You, O Lord, and root us in Your love, that we may become true peacemakers in our land and throughout the world. We pray in the name of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us look for where “*love rides a donkey*”. Let us support those who are showing love and let us pray for peace together.

Let us also pray for peace for Andrew and Chris Taylopr and for all of us who knew Grant Taylor. Grant passed away yesterday afternoon. I was able to see him at lunchtime and read him the words of John 14:27; “*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*”

“*Peace I leave with you.*” Let us pray for this peace and seek to share it with all around us!

Grace and peace, Belinda

(Illustration above - *Jesus rides into Jerusalem*, Lippi Memmi, 14th century)

Palm Sunday Reflection (Steve Garnaas-Holmes)

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. Psalm 118:22

*The king enters the city
on his war horse
while across town
love rides a donkey.*

*Guns and towers, vast machines,
engines. Generals boast
of victory over the child,
the hard edge over soft flesh.*

*The powerful strut and shamble,
loudspeakers announce their lies.
If there were money in darkness
they'd dismiss the sun.*

*God slips in through
the locked gate, the high wall.
In their high offices the light
is invisible to them.*

*The judge, the warden, the guards
believe you're nothing.
You'll never convince them otherwise.
But the stars know. The air knows.*

*Your peasant heart
rides a donkey, small and tender.
Honor the Royal Majesty
of the heart that belongs to love.*