



March 9, 2022

A Note from Pastor April

Dear Friends,

As we've been journeying through **The Great Story** this year, we've been talking about God's desire to be in relationship with us.

Throughout Lent, we'll be looking more closely at the very human stories of what that relationship looks like in real time. **In nearly every story, the characters we meet are experiencing significant seasons of growth as they learn to walk more closely with God.**

This was the case as we read the story of Jacob last week. At the end of a night of wrestling and facing the regrets of his past, Jacob is given a new name and a new blessing. This new identity comes out of struggle, a season where Jacob turns from his old patterns of deceit and running away and chooses to seek God in prayer and some deep internal reflection.

Jacob emerges from this experience of growth with the name Israel. The story of Jacob is also the origin story for the nation of Israel, a people who would continue to keep striving with God and men... growing and persisting through the challenges, eventually finding significant breakthroughs of learning and success.

**These days, we mostly take it for granted that part of being a human is that we grow.** When we write stories, the characters always deepen their understanding and mature.

We may not always love and embrace change and growth, but we certainly recognize the place that it has in our lives as we learn new things and expand our capacity to walk in the world with ourselves, with God, and with each other.



**At the time that these biblical stories were written, this was a new idea.** The cyclical nature of the moon was the basis for understanding human life and existence. Things moved in a circle. The future would be the same as the past. The Jewish idea that God was working in relationship *with* humans to build a future that was not predetermined had revolutionary and lasting impacts on the way civilizations began to function and understand themselves.

**In this past month, our human expectation of growth has been severely tested with the invasion of the sovereign nation of Ukraine by Russia.** In so many ways, Putin is attempting to move his nation (and the world) *backwards* in time, to an era when empires simply took what they wanted by force and intimidation. The tactics he has been using are subtle and modern, but the goal is an ancient one, fueled by the immature desires of domination and power and control.

**The resistance from around the globe tells us a great deal about how we have grown.** Even in the divided political climate of the U.S., we have stood together in opposition to this invasion and in our commitment to the people of Ukraine.

Across Europe, refugees have been cared for and welcomed. Most of us have watched with great awe as we see the tremendous heroism and bravery of the people in Ukraine who have stayed to fight.

Families, grandmothers, and people of all walks of life have risen in resistance to this desire to move their country backwards.

Probably the most memorable of these for me has been the grandmother who stood up to the soldiers, asking them why they were there, and offering them sunflower seeds for their pockets so that flowers would grow when they died.



Even in Russia, the people are joining those around the world in taking to the streets in protest.

There seems to be a sense of global solidarity, not only against the violence and egregious acts of war, but in our collective sense that **this is not the kind of world we are building. This kind of action takes us ALL in the wrong direction.**

As Christians and United Methodists, we stand in support of and solidarity with our Ukrainian brothers and sisters around the world. We know that our ability to live in freedom is not unrelated to the liberation of those who find themselves in war zones.

**Our path toward building the world God envisions will have to be a path that we learn to walk together.**

**Many have asked how we can be in support of our brothers and sisters during this time.**

One of the best ways you can do this is through the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) (<https://umcmission.org/umcor/>).

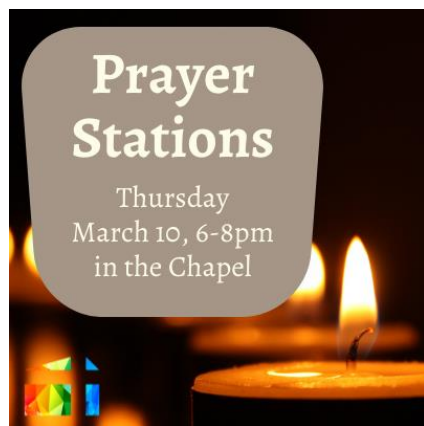
You can be sure that 100% of the proceeds will go to the efforts of our United Methodist partners already on the ground who are

working to help displaced persons and families find shelter and food and, in the aftermath of war, to help communities rebuild.



Here's how you can give to UMCOR:

- Online at <https://umcmission.org/advance-project/982450>
- By toll-free telephone: 888-252-6174
- By check made out to Global Ministries/UMCOR with "Advance #982450-Ukraine" written on the memo line, either mailed and addressed to Global Ministries/UMCOR, GPO, P.O. Box 9068, New York, NY, 10087-9068, or given at or through any United Methodist church.



Tomorrow evening we will have **prayer stations open in our chapel** in the education wing of the sanctuary building from 6-8pm. All are welcome. One of the stations will be to offer our prayers and light candles of solidarity with our friends in the Ukraine.

I'll close with a prayer we will be praying this Sunday together. It was written by our bishop for such a time as this:

*"Gracious, merciful, and loving God. We ought to look to you in every condition of life. But we most certainly seek your heart, your direction, and your will in this hour of crisis. Once again, we your children find ourselves shaken by our fears, insecurities, and anxieties as we watch war unfolding in*

*Ukraine. Receive our prayers for the people of Ukraine and Russia. We pray for the leaders of state in those countries, Europe, and the world that they will give themselves whole heartedly to negotiation and diplomacy as the best path to peace. We confess that all too often we give in to the impulses of aggression, violence, greed, and hatred rather than pursuing the work of peace making, peace building and peace keeping. Quicken all of our hearts to the truth of the Gospel that we are loved by you with an everlasting love and that there is enough for all people to flourish. Abiding in that love may we find the peace that 'surpasses knowledge.' We pray in the name of Jesus, Prince of Peace. Amen."* (Written and shared with permission by Bishop Gregory Palmer)

Blessings to each of you as we continue *forward* on this journey of growth,

Pastor April



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