

Losing It

March 2022

Most people do not want to be accused of losing it. Losing our tempers, losing our minds, losing control are not good things for most of us. Yet, Jesus asks us to lose it all, everything – to draw closer to him, the Father and Holy Spirit. He implores us to lose our lives to gain our lives. The Lenten season, which we have just begun, is designed for these very purposes. During the 40 days before Easter, we are to exercise the muscles of letting go, giving up, losing control, to be reborn anew in the resurrection power of our Lord. It is a time to pause, slow down, and stop accumulating so much. Perhaps we have more than we need, and we just don't know it.

Towards the end of his ministry, Jesus told his disciples he would soon enter Jerusalem, be rejected by the elders, leading priests, and teachers of religious law, and eventually be killed. But, he said, he would rise again after three days. In response, his disciples objected vociferously and emphatically in protest. But Jesus replied and taught them one of the most important lessons they had ever heard, a lesson that has become the heart of the Lenten experience for us today. With fresh ears, let's tune in and listen to what Jesus told Peter and the other disciples, as recorded in the Gospel of Mark:

"Jesus turned around and looked at his disciples then reprimanded Peter. 'Get away from me, Satan!' he said. 'You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's.' Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, 'If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But, if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?' (Mark 8:33-37)



Few times in history have we seen on such a large scale a person trying to gain the whole world with little regard for his soul than what Russian President Vladimir Putin is doing now in Ukraine. He has been brooding for years about the loss of power Russia once had in the world. He wants it back on his own terms, regardless of how many people might die in the process. He has little regard for how his actions might be transgressing everything Jesus ever taught. He wants to build his own empire according to his own ambitions. He believes he is totally in control, but the entire world knows otherwise; Putin is losing it, losing his mind, and losing his moral compass, if he ever had one. Echoing in the minds of nearly the entire world right now are the words Jesus spoke; "And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?"

What did Jesus mean when he said, "If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and the sake of the Good News, you will save it."? Every person on earth is faced with the same pressing question; who is in control of my life, God, or myself? It is a battle. Why are we so reluctant to give up control and allow God to guide, protect, and nurture our lives? Do we really think we can do a better job with our lives compared to what God can do with them? Yes, it is a leap of faith to turn over our lives to God. But if we do relinquish control to our Lord, we will save our souls, find endless purpose, peace, wisdom, joy, compassion, and eternal life. By giving away our lives to our Lord, we gain life everlasting.

Ukrainians are losing everything they have and own right now. With empty hands and barely anything in their possession, thousands are fleeing the war zones and seeking refuge. Others are staying, willing to fight and potentially lose their lives, for the sake of truth, freedom, and God's eternal justice. God sees everything. He knows the motives and actions of every human heart. He will not be mocked or fooled. In the end, and certainly at the end of this most horrible war, everyone will be judged according to the moral laws of the universe God created.



Ukrainian women and children refugees

Many Americans have a Ukrainian friend or some kind of contact with these brave and freedom-loving people. Twenty-five years ago, our family befriended a young Ukrainian woman, Oxsana Ambroz, who fled Ukraine and found asylum in America. We helped her find work and later I officiated her marriage to an American from the Chicago area. Oxsana now has a dynamic upholstery and design business in Chicago. She fled Ukraine because of the oppressive influence of Russia in Ukrainian life and the pain that still exists from what Stalin did years ago to so many of her people. Please pray for Oxsana's mother and relatives who are still in their mother country, practicing Orthodox Christianity, huddled now in a farmhouse in western Ukraine, hoping the Russians won't find or harm them

Last year, I became friends with Ukrainian Christian leaders working in the city of Kherson in southern Ukraine. These talented individuals began a thriving and lively Bible college in this control of our lives to Him, is all we need. We need nothing more. He will supply all our needs. We don't have to go chasing after them. They will come to us. The Christian life is an act of receiving, not managing or controlling everything. We have nothing valuable to offer another person until we receive what we need first from God.



My family and I wish you and your families a blessed Lenten season. May we keep our brothers and sisters in Ukraine in our hearts, praying for peace and an end to war.