

Immanuel United Church  
The First Sunday of Lent  
March 6th, 2022

Welcome

Call to Worship:

We may be entering this season arid, dry from pain and injustices.

**And yet, God is still hydrating our spirits.**

We may be wandering, feeling as if we have no direction.

**And yet, God is guiding us in the wilderness.**

We may be fearful, wondering what comes next.

**And yet, God is surrounding us with peace.**

We may begin our Lenten journey spiritually arid and anxious.

**But the Spirit of Strength will never leave our side.**

Opening Prayer:

**God of the wilderness,**

**as we enter into worship**

**may this be a time of preparation,**

**of challenge and change.**

**May the journey through this worship experience and this season**

**remind us of Jesus' journey**

**from the wilderness to the cross,**

**and from the cross to the empty tomb.**

**Open our hearts and minds**

**to receive your grace, peace, and strength. Amen.**

Hymn: VU 113 *To The Desert Jesus Came*

Scripture: Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.' Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone."'

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.' Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only God."'

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written,

"God will command God's angels concerning you, to protect you", and

"On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."'

Jesus answered him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."'

When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

The Choir Anthem: *Down to the River to Pray*

Reflection: "All the Kingdoms of the World" (Luke 4: 5)

Luke 4:5: Then the devil led Jesus up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.

In today's Gospel, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, fresh from his baptism in the Jordan river, is led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he is tempted by the devil. The first thing I notice in this reading and am appalled to recognize, is the contrast: The Human One, full of the Holy Spirit, is led by the Spirit to be fully present to his own identity and to God, the true source of life, the ground of being, in the wilderness, and the result is that "for forty days" he is tempted by the devil. Even if the number 40 is symbolic, evoking the memory and the identity of his own people, Israel's 40 years (which is most likely also symbolic) of wandering through the desert of Sinai, when we think about it, being tempted, tortured, provoked by the devil's temptations for 'forty days' tells us how relentless and immersive this journey was for Jesus. Today's reading says, "Jesus ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished." (V. 2)

In the scripture and throughout the ancient history of Israel, deserts were places of radical transformation where the people of God were shaped as a faithful community, seeking and striving to follow God's rule, God's law, which centers on equity, economic justice, and care for the marginalized (including immigrants and foreigners). For example, Leviticus 19:34 says, "The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the

citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." The desert regions of greatest importance in the scripture are the Sinai to the south in Egypt, the Judean wilderness in west-central Judah (where Jesus was baptized and tempted), and the Arabian desert to the east, separating Judah from Babylon. The last place was the literal and spiritual geography where Isaiah's prophecy and cry were written:

"A voice is calling: clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God." (Isaiah 40:3)

"I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." (Isaiah 43:19)

"The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus" (Isaiah 35:1)

This week, our hearts overflow with sorrow and indignation as we listen to the news of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Shock and outrage mingle with our tears at this horrific violation of innocent people in a sovereign nation. We have witnessed Russia's horrifying swath of murder and terror, the Ukrainians' desperate resistance and fight, and the outcries of more than one million innocent souls trying to flee from Russia's barbarity, all in the space of one week. This onslaught of horror has led me to think more deeply and do more research in order to shine the light of scripture on the root cause of this evil. Today's story of Jesus being tempted in the desert is a good place to start.

As many of you have already studied yourself, the ground that lies under this premeditated war is Russia's hundreds-year-old settler colonialism and Russian nationalism (imperialism) in Vladimir Putin's Russia. I believe that, in the words of today's Gospel, "All the kingdoms of the world" challenge or even condemn the notions and practices of settler colonialism and expansionist nationalism. Luke 4:5: "Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.'"

Many experts explain that Putin's obsession with Ukraine originates in a Russian imperialism and settler colonialism that are based on a religious belief that in the ninth century there was a state called Kievan Rus. This is where it was located. (Show the picture) The Slavic people lived here. The city of Kyiv was the capital between 980 and 1015. The Kievan Rus was ruled by a Grand Prince. In Russian, his name is Vladimir. In Ukrainian, Volodymir. Russians and Ukrainians both draw their lineage from this Slavic state. Much changed in the centuries that followed; Ukraine came under Russian rule.

There are many hidden histories that require, for a better understanding, critical lenses such as settler colonialism and religious and state imperialism.

There is a lot of history between the two nations but it all leads to the same point: Russia's claim to Ukraine on the basis of colonial history is unjustifiable and wrong. India-based journalist, Palki Sharema Padhya, compares the forced annexation of Ukraine to Britain reclaiming India or South Africa, or Spain reclaiming the Philippines. Past imperialism cannot justify present day expansionism – especially when the past is so horrific. Russian leader Katherine the Great started Russifying Ukraine in the 1700s (*Russification*). Ethnic Russians were shipped to Ukraine as settlers. Schools were told to teach in the Russian language. By 1800 the Ukrainian language was banned. In 1930 Soviet Leader Joseph Stalin engineered a famine in Ukraine (*Holodomor*: the Ukrainian words for hunger (*holod*) and extermination (*mor*)) as a punishment for Ukrainian defiance. Millions of Eastern Ukrainians were killed – starved to death in a region known for its wheat harvests. The area was re-populated with ethnic Russians. In the 1940s, the indigenous Tartars were forcefully relocated, and they were replaced with Russians.

There is a reason why Eastern Ukraine today has so many native Russian speakers. It was designed to be that way. Eastern Ukraine, historically, was important to Russia. It has coal. It has iron, and fertile land. Its historical connection with Russia was forced both by claims regarding the Holy Rus and repopulation. Putin's Russia has claimed that Russians and Ukrainians are one people. Today, the people of Ukraine, fighting to defend their national sovereignty and identity, bleed to defend themselves against Putin's Russian Imperialism. The description above is just a general quick summary; it requires much more to give a comprehensive, accurate picture of the land and its peoples.

Here's some of what I've learned from my personal readings.

According to Taras Kuzio, a Toronto-based academic and expert in Ukrainian political, economic and security affairs, a large number of western historians of 'Russia' and political scientists working on Russia continue to include Ukrainians within an imperial history of 'Russia', denying Ukrainians a separate history. For example, many denied that Kyiv Rus was part of Ukrainian history, as the history of a sovereign nation, independent from Russian history. It also supported the incorporation of Crimea into Russia based on the argument that the peninsula "had always been Russian." Many have downplayed Russian nationalism (imperialism) in Vladimir Putin's Russia and completely ignored the revival of Tsarist and White emigre Russian nationalism that denies the existence of Ukraine and Ukrainians. On the contrary, Ukrainian nationalism

was portrayed as a threat to forging an “All-Russian People” based on the three Eastern Slavs and undermined Russian foundational myths to ownership of Kyiv Rus. Tsarist Russia denied the existence of the Ukrainian language and claimed there had never been a Ukrainian state, that Ukraine had no history and that they were “Russians.” *Putinverstehers* (Putin-Understander) scholars treat Russian military aggression as some sort of a ‘civil war’ taking place in Ukraine.

Luke 4:5: “Then the devil led Jesus up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.”

In today’s Gospel, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, following his baptism, is led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he is tempted by the devil. Let us ask ourselves: What would we do? As a people of God, a community of faith, what would be our own critical reflection on our spiritual and political status in regards to the temptation of power, land, control of being promised “All the kingdoms of the world”?

The root cause, the evil of this invasion boils down to this: bending to the temptation of power (regardless of its character: political, economic, and/or religious). It’s not just reduced to one individual or one historical era. It’s how despots employ and the world permits imperialistic nationalism. It’s the opposite of what today’s Gospel reading teaches us. It’s the opposite of what we hope for today - to see Ukraine acknowledged as an independent nation, with its own identity and history. In this Lenten season, Christ is with Ukraine and other imperiled countries, seeking a future outside of the grip of the devils of not only war, but Imperialism (nor just Vladimir Putin’s Russian).

This is all I have for today, for our reflection on this first Sunday of Lent. As we continue on with the theme, “Make a Way, Rivers in the Desert: The Reflective Journey through the Desert of Divisions”, I encourage this community to define together, what would be the true opposite word / alternative story, or path, to “divisions”, that challenges nationalism, imperialism, and wars, in the world. Let us travel the symbolic and spiritual journey of 40 days with Jesus and with one another.

Hymn: VU 460 *All Who Hunger*

Offering: MV 191 *What Can I Do?*  
**What can I do? What can I bring?**  
**What can I say? What can I sing?**  
**I’ll sing with joy. I’ll say a prayer.**  
**I’ll bring my love. I’ll do my share.**

Communion:

God is with us.

**We are not alone.**

Christ is present here.

**The Spirit is among us.**

Let us give thanks to God,

**in memory and in hope.**

Thanks and praise be to you, O God,

for you create life out of the dust,

and sustain us even in the desert.

We thank you that in the face of every temptation and trial,

every principality and power,

you are present to direct and guide,

to renew and revive.

We praise you for sending us Jesus,

your Suffering Servant,

to walk before us the way of the cross,

to turn us to you and to one another.

Therefore, we join your long procession of pilgrims

praising you along the way:

**Holy, holy, holy God,**

**Power of life and love!**

**Heaven and earth are full of your glory!**

**Hosanna through the ages!**

**Blest is the One who comes to bring your justice to earth!**

Let us remember together that vision of God's reign

shown to us in Jesus at table:

**he shared food with followers and friends,**

**with saints and sinners,**

**with crowds of thousands on the hillside,**

**and a few friends in an upper room.**

On the night before he died,

he had supper with his companions.

He took a loaf of bread, and after giving thanks,

he broke it, and gave it to them, saying:

**"Take, eat. Do this in remembrance of me."**

Then, he took a cup, and after giving thanks,  
he passed it among them, saying:

**"Drink this. Do this in remembrance of me."**

Through this loaf and cup, Jesus lives within us.  
In word and deed, Jesus lives among us.

Holy God, we pray for your Spirit.

**Make us, while many, one.**

**Make us, though broken, whole.**

**Make us, despite death, alive.**

And so we pray:

**Come, Holy Spirit, come.**

Remembering the Community:

The news can be difficult to listen to and to read.

When that news relates to faces we know

and to voices familiar to us,

it becomes all the harder to hear.

God,

We ask you to hold the people of Ukraine deep in your heart.

Protect them, we pray;

from violence,

from political gamesmanship,

from being used and abused.

Give, we pray,

the nations of the world the courage

and the wisdom

to stand up for justice

and the courage too,

to dare to care—generously.

God, in your mercy,

take from us all

the tendencies in us

that seek to lord it over others:

take from us those traits

that see us pursuing our own needs and wants

before those of others.

Teach us how to live in love  
and dignity  
and respect—following your example.  
In your name and for your sake,  
Amen

—Issued by Lord Wallace, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of  
Scotland, and the Very Rev. Dr. Susan Brown, convener of the Faith Impact Forum,  
Church of Scotland

The Lord's Prayer

The bread that we break  
**is our sharing in the life of Christ.**  
The cup for which we give thanks  
**is our sharing in the life of Christ.**

Sharing the Bread and Cup

Prayer after Communion:

**Eternal and gracious One,  
though we live in a world of need,  
here we have tasted your goodness  
and hungered for a world more just.  
Though afflicted by brokenness and division,  
here we have heard your call  
to be a people of healing community.  
Though daily we touch our limits,  
here we have received  
the fullness of your grace.  
Send us forth, O God,  
in faith, in hope, and in love. Amen.**

Hymn: VU 108 *Throughout These Lenten Days and Nights*

Blessing & Sending Forth

**Giving and Sustaining God  
we experience your compelling call  
to undertake this Lenten journey;  
we hear your voice  
inviting us into the wilderness where our journey begins;**

**we trust in your presence with us on the way.  
Guide and support us through the wilderness.  
Inspire us to follow Christ in worship, and in witness;  
in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

### **Sending Letters of support to local Ukrainian churches**

Dear Immanuel United Church,

In case you are wishing to send letters of support to local Ukrainian churches, we are attaching the names & addresses of Ukrainian churches in Winnipeg. And the sample letter is from our United Church website.

May peace come to Ukraine!

## **Sample Letter of Concern for Ukrainian Communities:**

Dear siblings in Christ,

Our hearts overflow with sorrow as we listen to the news of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Shock and outrage mingle with our tears at this horrific violation of innocent people in a sovereign nation. We are aware that many in your congregation have family and friends residing in Ukraine who may be hard to reach at this time. We join our prayers to yours for their safety and well-being.

In love we reach out to you, our relatives, friends, and neighbours, to offer support and comfort. We open our hearts to you as we extend the hand of solidarity. You are not alone.

We pray with and for all people in Ukraine living in the midst of such violence, turmoil, fear, and devastation. We pray for peace and for an immediate cessation of war. We pray especially for political leaders, that they may do everything in their power to bring an end to these attacks. And we pray for all who offer humanitarian aid in the midst of this crisis.

With the Spirit, who broods over creation's waters and intercedes with sighs too deep for words, we hold you in prayer. May you know the strength and comfort of God's constant presence with you and your community.

In peace and solidarity,

*(Your neighbours at \_\_ United Church)*

The United Church of Canada 2 L'Église Unie du Canada

Ukrainian Evangelical Church  
730 Route 180  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2X 2H8

Blessed Virgin Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church  
965 Boyd Avenue  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2X 0Z9

Sts. Vladimir & Olga Cathedral  
115 McGregor Street  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2W 4V6

St. Andrews Ukrainian Catholic Church  
180 Euclid Avenue  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2W 3L4

Progress Ukrainian Catholic NE  
(Ukrainian Greek Catholic)  
233 Scotia Street  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2V 1V7

Saint Basil's Ukrainian Catholic Church  
202 Harcourt Street  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R3J 3H3

Holy Ghost Ukrainian Catholic Church  
40 Ada Street  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2R 0L5

St. John's Ukrainian Church  
31 Riel Avenue

Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2M 2M2

Holy Family Ukrainian Catholic Church  
1001 Grant Avenue  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R3M 1Y3

Saint Josaphat Ukrainian Catholic Church  
590 Alverstone Street  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R3G 2B9

Holy Eucharist Ukrainian Catholic Parish  
505 Watt Street  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2K 2S1

St. Joseph's Ukrainian Catholic Church  
250 Jefferson Avenue  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2V 0M6

St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Church  
737 Bannerman Avenue  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2X 1J9

Ukrainian-Orthodox Holy Trinity  
1175 Main Street  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2W 3S4

Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral  
820 Burrows Avenue  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2X 0R2

Consistory of Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

9 St. Johns Avenue  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2W 1G8 (Main office for Ukrainian Orthodox Churches in Canada)

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of All Saints  
1500 Day Street  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2C 1E4  
St. Ivan Suchavsky Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2W 3P2