

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

This is one of those times that a pastor has to make a decision to go with the sermon they had ready or address current events.

I will be tying words from a colleague in A Pastoral Letter in a Time of War¹ with our gospel reading today.

As news unfolds of escalating military action between the United States, Israel, and Iran, our hearts and minds hold many things at once. As a pastor, I am bound to lifting up the Gospel of peace, to proclaim the sacred dignity of every human being, to do the hard and holy work of truth telling.

To our military families, past and present, who know the costs of service and watch world events unfold knowing the very lives who are on the line, we see the pride, the loyalty, the moral complexity, and the vulnerability that you as military families carry.

Always in war there are the civilians who will be caught in the crossfire of decisions they did not make.
The mothers in Tehran and Tel Aviv.
The fathers in villages and cities.
The children who do not understand geopolitics but will understand the sound of sirens.
The elderly who have already survived too many conflicts.
God sees you.
Every human being bears the image of God.
The image of God does not carry a passport.
It does not salute a flag.
It does not belong to one nation more than another.
Every civilian life is sacred.
Every loss tears at the fabric of our shared humanity.
We grieve in advance for suffering that did not need to happen.

¹ Burns-LaGreca, Alison. A Pastoral Letter in a Time of War posted on FB by Jennifer Rome.

And to our military, and especially to our military families,
I have known service members and military chaplains throughout life
and my time serving as a pastor.

To the soldiers who stand ready because they swore an oath.

To the parents who scan the news with a tightening chest.

To the spouses who hold down households while holding back tears.

To the children who try to be brave because they think they must.

You are not invisible to God.

You are beloved.

The burden you carry is heavy.

The moral weight is real.

It is possible to love one's country and still wrestle with its decisions.

Those tensions are not signs of disloyalty.

They are signs of conscience.

As people of faith, we pray fiercely for protection over those in uniform.

And we pray just as fiercely for wisdom, restraint,
and repentance among leaders who wield power.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem.

He did not celebrate its destruction.

He lamented the blindness that led to it.

We must allow ourselves to lament.

There is a temptation in wartime to harden our hearts,
to narrow compassion only to those who look like us
or live within our borders.

That is not the way of Christ.

The Cross stands at the center of our faith,
a reminder of what happens when empire and fear collide with innocence.

Our calling is not to cheer destruction.

Our calling is to see the divine image in every human being.

To military families who feel the quiet dread rising in your bodies,
hear this clearly.

Your worry is holy.

Your sleepless nights are a form of love.

The Church stands ready to surround you with practical support,

consistent prayer, and tangible presence.

If you need help, ask.

If you are angry, say it.

If you are afraid, you are not weak.

To civilians abroad who will bear the brunt of this conflict,

we pray for your safety,

your protection, your dignity.

We reject any narrative that makes your suffering collateral or acceptable.

War may be declared by governments.

It is endured by ordinary people.

They asked him,

'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink?

³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing?

³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'

⁴⁰ And the king will answer them,

'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.'

Siblings in Christ,

Jesus moves in hospital rooms and military barracks.

Jesus sits beside anxious parents and frightened children.

Jesus weeps in refugee camps and stands vigil in command centers.

Jesus works through peacemakers, diplomats, chaplains, medics, and quiet saints who refuse to surrender compassion.

And, so, we pray.

We pray for de-escalation.

We pray for protection of civilians.

We pray for the safety and moral clarity of our soldiers.

We pray for leaders to choose wisdom over ego.

We pray for peace rooted in justice, not domination.

May the God of mercy hold every trembling heart.

May Christ, who knows violence from the inside,
stand with every soldier and every civilian.
May the Spirit guard minds, steady hands,
and soften what hatred would harden.
And may peace, real and costly peace, find its way to us.
Amen.