

Another week and another tragedy, another week and another senseless loss of life this time Munich!

It seems we are hearing and seeing a never ending stream of atrocities and violence tragedy upon tragedy around the world.

Shocked over the past few weeks with the scale of some of the tragedies the attacks carried out in places deliberately chosen to cause as much damage and loss as possible. I began to wonder how can I respond? We have recently finished the month of prayer and fasting raising financial support for Tranzend. We have been reminded about the unity that is to be a hallmark of the church. All in one canoe. But even so in the face of the scale of atrocities that have taken place in recent times, in various parts of the world what are we what am I to do? How can I respond? Or is it just too big? Can I just hope it stays over there and does not over here? After all we are a small country of no great significance,.....except when it comes to rugby.

What is a response that is not going to be trite, dismissive, or hopeless or worse yet downright ugly? What is a Christian response to be, how can I as a Christian respond in the light of what we have seen and what are the implications of this for our lives? Are we to live in the fear that this will happen here? Never leaving these shores, hoping that it won't come here? Build a wall (though we do have the sea a lot of sea which makes a good barrier), or is there a better way?

Isaiah 2:1-4

The Mountain of the Lord

2 This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

2 In the last days

the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established
as chief among the mountains;
it will be raised above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.

3 Many peoples will come and say,

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths."
The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

4 He will judge between the nations

and will settle disputes for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.

5 Come, O house of Jacob,
let us walk in the light of the LORD. ¹

In the last days!
Many peoples will come and say
Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord to the house of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us His ways so that we may walk in his paths.

The psalmist writes,
Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path!
I delight in the law of the Lord, I meditate on it day and night.

Blessed is the man
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers.

2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers. ²

He will judge between the nations
and will settle disputes for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.

5 Come, O house of Jacob,
let us walk in the light of the LORD.

Is there not a longing for such a time as this? Do we not at times long to see and wonder when it can happen that armies are no longer needed, that settling disputes and disagreements is no longer carried out with violence? Is this not something that we wish would happen? No more weapons, no more armies no more war! No more terror, no more!

An even better vision one that would be an awesome thing to see and be part of. One that at times is achingly close that we have glimpsed, heard the echo seen the picture, experienced it briefly and longed that the moment did not end!

Revelation 7:9-13

1 *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1984 (Is 2:1–5). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

2 *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1984 (Ps 1:1–3). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁹ After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”

¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying:

“Amen!
Praise and glory
and wisdom and thanks and honor
and power and strength
be to our God for ever and ever.
Amen!” ³

People from ALL, nations, a great multitude that no one could count, from EVERY nation, EVERY tribe, EVERY people and Language, standing before the throne!

What a sight that will be, what a time that will be but it is not yet!

We do however see the beginnings, the hints the glimpses of this reality happening here and now and it is those hints those glimpses as from afar that give hope, and give the start a basis for a response in the face of evil and tragedy! It is a response that is not trite, nor banal, nor hopeless.

For it begins in the heart of God and his love for the world, it reaches out, invites and calls to a people who will follow who will come, who will stream to hear and learn and then live the law of the Lord. And this is not the 600 individual rules, nor the myriad of regulations that have come and gone since, but the law that will be and is being written on the hearts of people as prophesied by Jeremiah, as summarized by Jesus in the gospels. To love the Lord your God with all your heart mind and soul, and to love your neighbour as yourself. On this all the prophets and law rest!

It begins in the heart of God! Hence in our response we go first to the heart of God. To strangely enough worship in its heights but also its depths of lament and longing. But it is to God, to our Abba, we go first. To learn his ways, to seek his face, and his grace.

It is our of his heart that flows the love that will enable people to love one another, to forgive one another as we have been forgiven, to hold our faith firm in the face of overwhelming odds and pressures, tribulations trials and challenges to our faith.

Then it is to live in the light of his love and grace, as Isaiah said to learn His ways so that we might walk in his paths! To do what is right! To love as we have been loved.

To work toward forgiveness and reconciliation to love those who do not like us to have our lives transformed by renewing our minds are all response that we as individuals and we as churches can make in the light of events that are beyond our control.

3 *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1984 (Re 7:9–12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

To see former enemies worship together break bread together, to forgive one another is to see a glimpse of heaven. To be part of worship gatherings where there are people of many different backgrounds and languages is awe-inspiring and beautiful to behold, and wonderful to experience!

It is to get a glimpse of what the vision of revelation is all about, to be lost in wonder and praise of God our Father, of the Lamb, our saviour, and of the church at work moved by the Holy Spirit.

But it does not just stop there! It is not just the time of heavenly transcending worship, it flows out into the life that is lived, the work that is done.

The church as a whole and Christians as individuals have been doing this down through the ages, there are myriad accounts of Christians worshipping loving and growing in the midst many times of overwhelming persecution, and hardships.

Reconciliation, and the making of peace, that can only truly happen when the Prince of Peace is changing hearts and transforming minds. To experience moments of reconciliation of forgiveness and restoration of fellowship is truly life changing. To see Arab and Hebrew worshipping together, to see Xhosa and Africaaner, worshipping together is to see heaven breaking through and the church at its best!

Every couple of years the Presbyterian church gathers together in what is called General Assembly, to decide matters and policy for the denomination. I have been to some very hard assemblies and at times despaired at what we as the church can do to each other. But then there are times when it seems that the Holy Spirit breaks in and all is lost in wonder and praise, where the heaviness the weight is lifted and the light of God breaks through, and four hundred delegates representing nations and people groups from around the pacific join in fellowship and song!

What then is our response in the light of War and the hope for Peace.

First to look to God our Abba Father, to learn His ways to seek his face.

Second to join together with others in worship fellowship and life, that is to be in the church, yes with all its warts and hangups, it is the place where we can demonstrate love for one another as God has loved us.

Third it is to hold firmly to the faith, to persevere trusting that in the end there will be those from every tribe, language, nation and tongue before the throne. That we to may be there in that great choir.