**New Hope Global Sermon We Have Heard 5/5/22 Colossians 1:3-8**

**Introduction**

The New Testament churches were obviously not perfect, but there are models among them that we need to emulate today. The Colossian church is such a model. Paul describes them by their deeds in Col. 1:3-8:

*The Passion Translation*: Every time we pray for you our hearts overflow with thanksgiving to Father God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. For we have heard of your devoted lives of faith in Christ Jesus and your tender love toward all his holy believers (v. 3-4).

*The Message* translates this as: We keep getting reports on your steady faith in Christ, our Jesus, and the love you continuously extend to all Christians. The lines of purpose in your lives never grow slack, tightly tied as they are to your future in heaven, kept taut by hope. 5-8The Message is as true among you today as when you first heard it. It doesn’t diminish or weaken over time. It’s the same all over the world. . .Epaphras is the one who told us how thoroughly love had been worked into your lives by the Spirit.

“We have heard. . .” People’s reputation is how one is thought of by others and judged by their character and actions. Obviously one’s reputation can be positive (“he is kind”) or negative (“he is a cheat.”) Churches have reputations as well, so the issue today is: what is the reputation your church has in the community, or your family or even your nation? What are the reports that keep circulating about you?

In the case of the church in Colossae their reputation is wonderful. Notice the phrases: “your steady faith in Christ, our Jesus, and the love you continuously extend to all Christians. . . how thoroughly love had been worked into your lives by the Spirit.” The Passion translation says “the many wonderful ways love is being demonstrated through your lives by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit”(Col.1:8).

To more fully appreciate the power of a Christian church’s witness in a secular nation, I want to share some stories of how this kind of love and witness is being borne out in the churches in Ukraine, and Eastern Europe as Ukraine is fighting for its survival against Russia’s deadly efforts to bring Ukraine under its domination.

**Update from the Christian Chronicle published in Ukraine**

The President of the Chronicle posted this article “As Russian Attacks Intensify, Churches Organize Rescue Missions, Relief Centers And Baptisms.”

Dima Grischuk drove east on a snow-covered road in Ukraine. He passed a small line of cars — all headed west. Grischuk is part of a caravan of Christians taking supplies to congregations in their country’s hard-hit eastern cities. They plan to help churches set up bomb shelters and deliver aid. They also plan to bring refugees back with them.

In Ukraine’s capital, Kyiv, Grischuk worshipped with a congregation named, appropriately enough, the City of Refuge Church of Christ. He taught at the [Ukrainian Bible Institute,](https://www.facebook.com/ukrainianbibleinstitute/) which prepares men and women for ministry in Ukraine. After conflict in eastern Ukraine broke out in 2014, he launched a ministry called Let’s Love to provide relief aid for those displaced as pro-Russian separatists seized church buildings in cities including Donetsk and Luhansk.

Dmitry “Dima” Grischuk says goodbye to his youngest child, Deya, before leaving on a relief trip with Let’s Love. “Look at these brave guys,” Grischuk said in a video posted just before the caravan departed with giant yellow-and-blue stickers bearing crosses on the hoods of their cars and vans. “They are going with us to help people in need and to evacuate women and children.”

Fighting has intensified in eastern Ukrainian cities near the separatist-held regions, including Mariupol and Kharkiv. Rob Hindman, a former missionary to Kharkiv, posts regular reports to social media from his contacts in the city and across Ukraine: “The pool of friends and contacts of ours that are still remaining in Kharkiv is shrinking as more and more people are finally deciding they shouldn’t keep sticking it out,” Hindman wrote in a recent post.

Julie Kachuk is one of the church members who made the painful decision to leave Kharkiv.

“Will I ever see my mother again?” she wrote in a social media post. “We are scattered all over the earth. … I’m just crying. I can’t hold back the tears. Should I be ashamed of this?“My home now, it’s a suitcase and a path — a path to a place I don’t know yet. We are the pilgrims. All I know is that God is leading somewhere.” ([Julie Kachuk](https://www.facebook.com/julie.kachuk) on [Saturday, March 5, 2022](https://www.facebook.com/julie.kachuk/posts/5230844443614576)).

The situation in Kharkiv is bad, Hindman wrote, “but they still have it good compared to those in Mariupol,” where many “remain trapped in a place where they are without electricity, internet and phone service and are possibly running out of basic food needs.”

A minister for a Church of Christ in Mariupol was caught in the crossfire during an attack in the city and was struck in the head by a stray bullet, Hindman reported. The minister was listed as stable in a local hospital in late February, but Hindman said he has been unable to get additional updates.

**Churches welcoming fleeing Ukrainians in Eastern European**

But the cars keep ferrying Ukrainians out of the country into welcoming churches in eastern Europe. Churches of Christ in Poland, Slovakia and Romania are setting up relief centers. In Sopot, a town on the Baltic Sea in northern Poland, church members assembled bunk beds and prepared their meeting place to house Ukrainian guests. Brandon Price, an instructor at the Ukrainian Bible Institute, is working with the church and welcoming his fellow Christians. “The [Sopot Church of Christ](https://www.facebook.com/mandm.dawidow) has been such an example of what it means to love your neighbor as yourself,” Price said. “It’s a blessing to work with them in this.”

 Molly Dawidow, a longtime missionary in Sopot, assists in the distribution of food and supplies for the refugees. In addition to the essentials, “someone had donated a plastic bag full of these little cars,” she said. She poured them out on a table so a young Ukrainian boy could take one. As the refugee child looked over a table of donated toy vehicles, “his little eyes lit up,” she said. “He jumped up and down and clapped his hands together. I am telling you, folks, I couldn’t hold back the tears. “He couldn’t decide between the green one and a red one but finally settled on the green one. I couldn’t help it. I gave him the red one too. Later in the day, unprompted, he brought a translator and thanked me. … Pray for God to heal his little broken heart.”

Back in Ukraine, the caravan from the Let’s Love ministry planned to stop in the city of Poltava and assist members of a Church of Christ there. Years ago, the small congregation in Poltava had split over doctrinal issues, church members told *The Christian Chronicle* during a reporting trip to Ukraine in 2015. Then a minister from Donetsk who graduated from the Ukrainian Bible Institute arrived in the city after his city fell to pro-Russian separatists. He asked the church members about the cause of the split and helped the two sides resolve their differences. The church began to grow again.

Good news from Warsaw Poland, as on this International Women’s Day… our dear friend Polina becomes a true Woman of God....(Posted by [Jeff Abrams](https://www.facebook.com/preacherabrams) on [Tuesday, March 8, 2022](https://www.facebook.com/preacherabrams/posts/7881238045227028)).

**A freshly washed sister**

The latest conflict could produce similar stories, Ukrainian Christians told the *Chronicle*. In Kyiv, a Church of Christ experienced two baptisms as it sheltered Ukrainians in its basement.

In Warsaw, Poland, a young woman who fled Ukraine was baptized, said Jeff Abrams, a minister from Alabama who is working with refugees there. “Our freshly washed sister has given us some desperately needed good news in these dark times,” Abrams said (Erik Tryggestad is president and CEO of [The Christian Chronicle.](https://christianchronicle.org/) March, 2022).

Then hear this update from Carol Dobson who has ministered in and maintained contact with several churches in Ukraine:

Many churches in Ukraine, including the one I served alongside of on many different trips, have turned their churches into help centers. These churches with added donations have purchased and given many things to house and feed displaced people as they move toward the Polish or Moldovan borders.

One church I know received enough funds to purchase two 20 passenger vans. Volunteers have made evacuation trips to eastern Ukraine to pick up people and take them to various locations away from the fighting, including to the western border to flee the country.

One young man, Peter, in his early 20s was in the States for college and had many contacts in Texas. Peter had a vision to take bags of food to those in need in their town. Food has started to become scarce. His friends donated enough money for him and his Ukrainian friends to purchase and package bags full of groceries and products to take into homes. They have blessed 100 families this way. Peter asked the people he took food to what they wanted prayer for, and he and his friends would pray for each family before leaving. Praise God for their generous and courageous love!” (Dobson, 5 2 22)

**Our Challenge**

As with the Colossian believers, the accolade “how thoroughly love has been demonstrated through your lives by the Holy Spirit” fits these descriptions of the believers and their churches in Ukraine. They illustrate the very costly sacrifice God’s love can endure. Unfortunately, we don’t have all those cultural and contextual details for the Colossian believers, but even without that “hard evidence” the testimonies from Epaphras and others were laudatory.

“We have heard…” How can our own corporate witness in our context be as exemplary? The Ukrainian believers and all who are supporting them have given us a model today. May we follow in the footsteps of all those like them through the centuries. Amen.

 Dr. Mary Lou Codman-Wilson 5 5 22

 Pastor, New Hope Global Church