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**Opinion: The way of the warrior**

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I’m an interfaith minister. My default for addressing problems has always been the way of nonviolence. So, it may surprise you when I say I’m not a pacifist.

I do believe there are times when the right action calls for the warrior to rise up. When Hitler was seeking expansion and engaging in ethnic cleansing, giving rise to the eradication of the Jews, was one such time. Today, Putin’s war on Ukraine is another.

But I’m no military strategist or political analyst so I’ll leave such commentary to those better qualified. Instead, I’ll share a story in hopes that it’ll reveal just why I believe that this moment, indeed, calls for the way of the warrior.

Imagine you live in an old family home, well-aged by several generations of babies’ cries, backyard birthday parties, holiday gatherings and by many nights of just star gazing off the back porch. It is who you are. Your great, great grandparents had settled in this home and you want nothing more than for your children and grandchildren to know the feel of the old, curvy, wooden floors beneath their bare feet and to smell all those lingering scents drifting out of the kitchen at mealtime.

Then, one day, when all of the extended family had gathered for a family reunion, the unthinkable happens. You wake in the middle of the night to hear rustling and voices outside and then you smell smoke coming up from below. Frantically you run down and discover a small fire, just starting, from the back wall in the kitchen. Luckily, the fire department is close by so you immediately call but the person answering the phone, after taking down your address, says they’ll have to call you right back.

Shaken and confused, you race through the house yelling to wake everyone while still trying desperately to keep the children calm. The biggest challenge is to get your elderly grandmother, who’s unable to walk without help, down the stairs from the top floor. All of your other relatives are now up and rushing around erratically trying to grab what they can from the closets and drawers.

As the smoke begins to fill the house, you call the fire department again and, this time, the voice on the other end, trying to be as compassionate as possible, tries to explain that, because you’re just beyond the town line, they’re not able to come.

“What?! But you’re so close!” you shout not believing what you’re hearing. “I’m losing my home!”

“I’m so very sorry,” the person says with a shaky voice. “I really wish we could send our fire trucks. Really. But we’ll send over some things that can help you to put out the fire along with some supplies. They’ll be on the way soon.” And the call ends.

Meanwhile, two of the children have run back into the house to get their special stuffed animals, and now they’re nowhere to be found. But there’s too much smoke coming from the house to go back in to look for them. And you know the house will soon collapse.

Numb, tremblingly uncontrollably, shrouded tight in your worst nightmare, unable to fully grasp the magnitude of what’s happening, you frantically call the fire department again, this time screaming into the phone unable to control yourself.

“Please come! Now! Two children have gone back inside and the house is about to fall! Please come now!!!”

But the voice on the other end, choking back tears, says again, “I’m so very sorry, sir. I so wish we could help. Your supplies will be arriving soon.”

Now you may think this is an oversimplification of Zelenskyy’s plea to us for help. But is it?

I don’t know about you but if it were my children trapped inside a burning house, my family’s homestead being leveled, my entire life literally going up in smoke, being told my home is outside the town line would feel about as arbitrary and irrelevant as being told in essence, “Sorry. You’re not a part of NATO so we’re under no obligation to send our fire trucks. But we will send you what we can with additional supplies.”

Yes, I do understand the larger potential implications of sending what is really needed, those fire trucks — the possibility of nuclear warfare and the start of World War III. But please tell me, what better use could there be of the world’s most powerful military than for it to defend an innocent democratic country being unjustly and brutally attacked by a much larger and more powerful autocratic one?

And what message does this send to Putin and to all the other autocratic leaders around the world? I fear it emboldens them as the forces of terror and genocide are being allowed to prevail.

The way of the warrior always requires fearlessness in the face of death. It does so because it knows some things are worth fighting for, dying for, so, freedom and justice for all, for all peoples, may prevail.

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