



Dear FBC Watsonville,

We have suffered the loss of many things in Russia's war of aggression... a house, a dog, fellowship with friends we had known for almost two decades. But none of these losses compares to the loss of my good friend and confidante, Serhiy Moroz, who passed away after a horrible accident when returning from a mission trip to Asia two years ago today. Pastor, statesman, husband, father, friend... I was in the states when it happened and was only able to get to Ukraine about a month after. Even now, it is difficult to imagine a Ukraine without Serhiy.

We met while trying to figure out how to establish a church planting training program - one that would recruit, train, mentor and sometimes provide start-up capital to young men who showed potential as a leader and certain qualities that would make someone a good church planter. Our teamwork resulted in the planting of more than 26 new churches in eastern Ukraine and thousands of lives changed for the Kingdom.

There is one phone call I will never forget. Serhiy called and sounded crestfallen. He explained that they had just bought a house in a village in eastern Ukraine for the planting of a new church. The former owners left the house and went to live in a flat in a nearby city. Supposing they still had the money with them, a few "narco-mahny" (drug addicts) found them and beat them to death in an attempt to rob them. Their eight-year-old daughter was found by a neighbor wandering near a bus stop the next morning understandably traumatized by whatever she had seen the previous night and that morning Serhiy was worried about what the people in the village

would think. Sure enough, there were people suggesting the "baptists" (code for anybody not Russian Orthodox) had done it or arranged it. Remnants of Soviet propaganda were floating around the village. "How will we be able to plant a church in this village now?"

My heart was breaking for Serhiy, for the church planter making plans to move there, for the slain parents and for the little girl, as well as for a village traumatized by this senseless act of violence. The Holy Spirit gave me the words that would encourage and provide clarity in this situation, "**Serhiy, do you think this was a surprise to God?**" The line was dead quiet as Serhiy was mulling this around. We talked a little more and if memory serves me, we prayed before hanging up the phone.

The church held a funeral, paid for the burial plots, and did what they could to minister to the remaining family. The parents of the murdered couple came to the defense of the "sectarians", thus defusing the situation. A church was planted and served the Lord greatly. People came to know Jesus as Lord and Savior. In the years following, I heard this story on a number of occasions while traveling with Serhiy to speak about church planting and to meet with pastors, church planters, and regional presbyters. "**When you encounter setbacks, do you think this is a surprise to God?**" he would preach.

I am sure I learned more from Serhiy than he ever learned from me, but I was simply grateful that God had allowed me to both sharpen and be sharpened by this great friend and man of God.



Two months after Serhiy's tragic accident, Beth and I stopped and placed some flowers at the site. The guard rail was still lying on the ground by the road. I paused to shed a tear and thank God for allowing me to know Serhiy and to have had such a good friend.

The place of the accident is called, Selo Tarakaniv, which means "Village of the Cockroaches." Despite its name, the people were exceptionally kind and hospitable. They offered us flowers, tea and sent us away with apples. Somehow, they understood that something significant had happened there.

This war affects so many people on so many levels. If only there had been no war, Serhiy would have flown straight to Kyiv. Instead, he flew into Krakow, picked up his car and began the long trek to Kyiv. Reportedly, his weariness overcame him and he only made it to Tarakaniv and was taken the rest of the way to Kyiv in an ambulance, where he passed away with a peaceful smile on his face.

Many times, I've recalled this event, only to feel my blood start to boil. "Stupid Putin..." and so on and so forth. "If it hadn't been for this war, my buddy Serhiy would still be here." These are the things that have raged inside my heart and mind. Until... until I hear those same words we said so many years before... "and do you think this is a surprise to the Lord?" Yes, it is true, there is a time for everything under the sun and the Lord knows the number of our days. Serhiy's day was on this very day two years ago, the 23rd of April, 2023. That is the day God was not surprised to welcome His friend, Serhiy, into His heavenly kingdom.

Praise & Prayer Request

- Praise God that despite the over 3000 Russian attacks along the front lines, no "Palm Sunday" style attack with ballistic missiles against civilians were recorded on Easter.
- Chaplains often refer to the number of soldiers who are no longer taking their phone calls. It is code for the people they have ministered to and whose lives have been taken by the war. Eric had contacted a friend who is serving to check in with him after a long period of time. We began to worry when after a couple days there was no response. Praise God with us that our friend has now responded, he is alive and well, and is indeed, "returning his calls."
- Please continue praying for a lasting and just end to the war.
- As Beth and I were talking through this letter a few minutes ago (she proofs each letter before they are sent), a series of about seven explosions could be heard or felt as Ukraine was shooting down drones or missiles. I will not know until morning how close they were, but they were obviously trying to make their way to Kyiv. Please pray for anyone whose lives were affected by the debris from these explosions and from the ones that made it past the air defense.

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