

# Impossible Situations

*The Bomb – February 21<sup>st</sup> 2024*



History has it that Robert Oppenheimer led the technical effort to produce the atomic bomb, which resulted in the deployment of two such weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. That is sort of correct. In fact, it was Leo Slizard in 1933 who first described the possibility of a nuclear ‘chain reaction’, and Enrico Fermi who made it work in an experimental reactor in 1942 at the University of Chicago. Physicists love their blackboards and chalk, and so it was not long before a formula was scratched out that predicted the total power that could be unleashed. And once it was unleashed there was no going back again.

When Jesus began his public ministry of healing miracles, depending upon which gospel you read, he is remembered as being keen to contain the fallout of his divine power. It’s surprising for us to read how Jesus often said ‘*don’t tell anyone what you have seen*’ (Luke 4:37, Luke 5:14). Jesus had his own version of a chain reaction, that he wanted to contain (Mark 1:45). Perhaps he was concerned to avoid an impossible situation, where his purposes as our saviour were appropriated by others and demanded of him in a way God hadn’t ever intended. We now know that God did have a plan for Christ to address the great needs of everyone, but it wasn’t limited to being a healer of diseases and disabilities. Nevertheless, it did happen that way and before too long Jesus was the great attraction for good reasons, but not the right reasons. Quite understandable really. After all, who wants to stay suffering with leprosy? You have heard me say that hope is the most powerful force I all creation.

By 1985 global stockpiles of nuclear bombs had reached a record high of almost 65,000 worldwide. That same blackboard formula would probably tell us that that much power is enough to destroy all living things on the Earth 17 times over! Ok I made up that last figure, but it’s ok to exaggerate when considering something so mad.

In two recent sermons I have stated that ‘*the cross will not take away your sinful nature*’. It seems to have emerged for me as a personal theme for this Lent, but we all know it’s true. The total effect of sin across the Earth is

enormous and destructive. No formula can contain it, but I have also said that there is something which can limit sin – death. It's well known that Robert Oppenheimer came to regret the power he and his team had unleashed. *'Now I am death—the destroyer of worlds'* which he quotes the Bhagavad Gita, Hindu scriptures. The *Mutually Assured Destruction* of nuclear weaponry is the nearest thing to sin that humanity has produced by its own hand. Those bombs are the very synthesis of our most destructive nature, which is already out of control in a chain reaction we cannot contain.

Back again to 1985, when as a young man I had a sinking feeling that one day it might all come to an end in a horrible way. It was the thought of nightmares – literally. I grew up under the bomb. What did Nikita Khrushchev mean when he said, *'we will bury you'*? Not much hope to shout about there.

When reading the Passion Story, we may think of the triumphal procession of Christ into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-11), seated on a donkey, as the opening scene of what was to come through that first Easter. The crowd was considerable, all a result of the reputation that had built up around him. The shouts of *'Hosanna'* were to *'save us'*. Those at the parade that day, perhaps just like a procession of missiles rolling through Moscow on 1<sup>st</sup> May each year, is for the hope of power and triumph. Hosanna is a rendition of Psalm 118:25, part of a hymn of thanksgiving in victory, attributed to King David from whose line Jesus Christ would follow that day. Within a week they were to be disappointed, gathering this time to demand his death.

Take a little time to absorb all this. The only way to contain the destructive force of all those warheads is to keep a balance of more – that is the madness which is assured. If we equate such destructive power to sin, as I have suggested, then we ought to compare the method of its containment. More sin and more death? I'm afraid it is so. Both are an impossible situation it seems. Well, not quite.

When Christ died on the cross, as we surely would have in his place, and as we surely would do in a nuclear exchange, we know that it is not the end. They did bury Jesus, but God provided a new nature for us to be assured of - eternal life, the nature of the resurrection. The human sinful nature is not an impossible situation. Go and tell everyone.

*Rector Chris*