Ministerial Meandering

An icy wind stripped the surface snow, mixing it with the blizzard and sending sheets of horizontal needles across the expanse of bleak and empty fields. It was well below zero, and the roaring gusts of wind sent it plummeting even further into instant frostbite temperatures. Leaving any form of shelter was insane, but some had no choice. They had been days without food already, and eating snow became an exercise in futility. The spectre of death seemed to howl around the group of bent beings, leaning against the wind, almost as if embracing it. Their torn and threadbare coats gave little protection against the bitter elements, and the cruelty of the winter was only matched by the barbarism of those who herded these hopeless creatures.

Detailed to ensure that the work party filled their quota - irrespective of conditions - the guards had no sympathy for their charges, indeed, they would have been happier if they had all died quickly so that they could get back to their barrack rooms. At least they had a stove there and could make a hot drink, which was more than the prisoners could hope for.

Vicious icicles hung threateningly from each window of the prison blocks, inside and out, as the glass had long since given up the futile task of resisting the forces of nature. There was snow on the floors that the occupants attempted to remove intermittently, but it was a thankless exercise with only broken boards to use as shovels, and more piling up all the time.

Bad as things were, the worst part was the order for silence from the guards - not that the prisoners had much energy for speech, but the opportunity to encourage one another, or share some black humour would have done much to lighten their load.

As it was, they could only watch as one of their members slowed and slowed in his efforts, every movement becoming visibly more painful and exhausting. The guards had beaten him back to his feet several times with their rifle butts, but were now tired of that sport, sharing a cigarette and taking bets on how long it would take before the pathetic individual dropped again, with no further strength to rise.

There would be one less on roll call on return tonight, at least; that was certain. Still, only three more months of winter, and then Spring, with new faces to beat into submission.

The curious and unsettling thing about it was, though, that the prisoners didn’t appear to be submitting to their cruelty, which would have been satisfying, but rather giving in to the cold of winter as to a lover’s embrace - they seemed to almost welcome it, dying with a look of peace and acceptance on their faces - not the fear and terror the guards would have preferred, to bolster up their fragile egos.

But this is only a story of being cold - and we only had to put up with a power outage for a short while. It just made me think, because this story is still playing out in northern China with the Uyghurs - even if you thought I was telling a story of German concentration camps in World War Two. It just hasn’t changed. How do you think Jesus would have approached this?

Philip+