



GOD IS OUR REFUGE & STRENGTH

“God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.

So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea.”

Psalm 46: 1&2 NLT.

I don't know about you, but after nearly a year of this Pandemic, I can honestly say that at times it has felt like this country - if not the whole world - has been shaken, and the land that we stand on feels like it keeps shifting.

Or, put it another way, it's felt like a lot of the things we've previously put our confidence in, our Defences, safety from attack that would bring our country to a standstill, or our best medicines and practices to stop people dying - have quite literally crumbled before our eyes like a mountain, or a cliff edge crumbling down into the sea.

So, not only have our lives been shaken, but much of what we relied upon has been found wanting and insecure.

For the non-Christian, all that would feel utterly depressing, and causing a real sense of uncertainty, anxiety and gloom. But not for the Christian!

The Psalmist, foreknowing that in life Christians would go through 'personal earthquakes', and times in life when their 'plans, and foundations' would crumble before their eyes, says that we 'need not fear!

Really? In the midst of a pandemic? When you've been furloughed? When your boss has already told staff that if this goes on much longer, the business could fold? Or, that test, or that operation you so desperately need has been cancelled - or postponed yet again? Really - need not fear?

Yes. And here's why.

It's because none of those things that we had put our trust and hope in would, or could, ever really be a fool-proof defence against trouble. And however much humanly we may try to shield ourselves from trouble, life has a habit of crumbling at one edge, or maybe two at the same time, and it feels like our lives are being

poured out, and we have no way of stopping the crumbling into the sea.

No. None of our human things would ever protect fully against life's earthquakes and crumbling times. ***But there is one to whom we can commit our lives and future: the one who, for thousands of years, starting with the Jews, then to all who believe and trust in His son, has been a dependable, reliable, ever present refuge and strength - God himself.***

No-one else has arms wide enough to encompass the world's problems, or a heart big enough to weep with all who weep across the globe, having lost a loved one through Covid-19. Or, for the thousands of emergency service staff who are literally falling asleep standing - such is their exhaustion.

No one else can provide the strength to the mum who has been up everyday for a year at 6am to get as much personal work, and house work done, and school worksheets printed off, ready to start being a 'teacher' from 9-3, before everything else she has to do before flopping into bed exhausted, only to start again the next day.

Or the strength, and place of peace and security to the pensioner who is fearful of catching the virus due to previous health issues.

Only God, the one who made us, and knows us better than we know ourselves. Who knows what every day of our future holds.

Only God, who loved us enough to send His son to die for us could be the refuge *“always ready to help in times of trouble”*. Never too busy. Never so much to handle so he leaves the answer-machine on. Never overwhelmed by the magnitude of requests for help because only God the Father longs to hear his children say *‘Abba (daddy), please help me!’*

This past week, the UK reached a horrific milestone with 100,000 Covid-19 related deaths. And, even with the fabulous hope that the vaccines now offer, if we're really honest, probably each of us, at some point or another over the past 12 months, has gone into a room, on our own, and shed some tears as it's all just been too

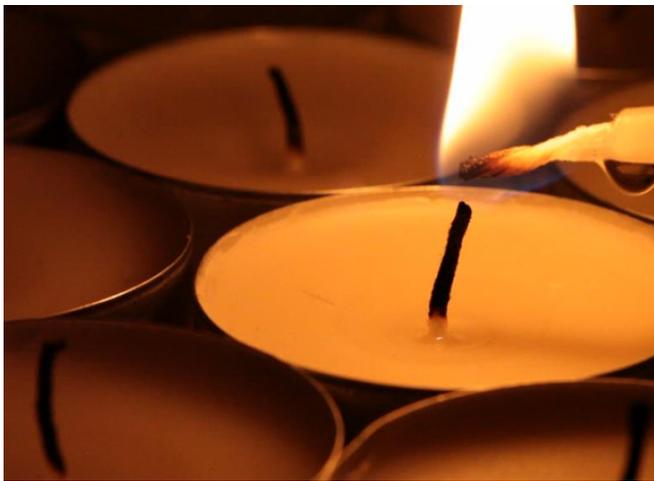
much - I know I have, and I guess you have too. And that's ok. That's healthy!

But, when such moments come, we must also turn that tear-filled face towards the face of God, our Father, and in Him, find the faithful, eternal refuge who will see us through this crisis - and whatever else life throws at us on this earth till one day, we shall see Him face to face.

And there, we are promised, there shall be no more weeping - and there will be no more need of refuge places – because ALL things shall become new, and God will reign with His children in a place where viruses, disease and war no longer exist.

May you know God as YOUR refuge this week, and this Lent - starting on February 17, Ash Wednesday.

ARCHBISHOPS' INVITE TO PAUSE, PRAY AND REMEMBER



The Archbishops of Canterbury and York are issuing a Call to the Nation to pause and reflect to remember the more than 100,000 people across the UK who have died after contracting Covid-19 and all those who know and love them.

In an open letter, Archbishops Justin Welby and Stephen Cottrell say that death, does not have “*the last word*”, and the Christian faith promises that one day “*every tear will be wiped away*”. God, they write, knows grief and suffering and “*shares in the weight of our sadness*”.

Acknowledging the wider impact of the pandemic on the whole of society through loneliness, anxiety and economic hardship, they invite people to “*cast their fears on God*”.

It acknowledges many who have lost their livelihoods as a result of the economic impact of the pandemic and it speaks about those unable to be with loved ones as they died or even at their graveside because of the restrictions.

The archbishops give thanks for NHS and social care staff, who they describe as “*a blessing and*

lifeline for our nation”; for clergy, other frontline workers and “*so many good neighbours*”. They give thanks for the development of vaccines and reiterate a call to everyone to take the vaccine when it is offered.

The letter includes an invitation to everyone to **join the Archbishops in pausing and praying each day at 6pm from February 1.**

The Archbishops write: “*We write to you in consolation, but also in encouragement, and ultimately in the hope of Jesus Christ. The God who comes to us in Jesus knew grief and suffering himself. On the cross, Jesus shares the weight of our sadness.*”

They conclude: “*Most of all, we have hope because God raised Jesus from the dead. This is the Christian hope that we will be celebrating at Easter.*

“*We live in the hope that we will share in his resurrection. Death doesn't have the last word. In God's kingdom, every tear will be wiped away.*

“*Please be assured of our prayers. Please join us.*”

The tragic milestone comes amid lockdown conditions in which large gatherings such as a national memorial service are not possible in person.

It is expected that the Church of England will hold Services of Remembrance for those who have died and thanksgiving for all those who have cared for them when it is possible to do so.

BIBLE READINGS FOR SUNDAY

THE Bible readings are Psalm 111, Habakkuk 2: 1-7 and Mark 1: 21-28. A hard copy of Nigel's sermon will be emailed on Sunday to all on the FFNews circulation list, complete with personal/group questions that you may wish to use in the coming week.

PRAYER TOPICS

Saturday – Betty Moore, whose son Andrew has died.

Sunday – our bishops

Monday – staff and pupils of the village school

Tuesday – parents home-schooling children

Wednesday – all emergency services/key workers

Thursday – those recovering from Covid

Friday – for God's peace to be present in each home in the village.

MORNING PRAYER READINGS

THE MP daily Bible readings (including for Lent) are attached. Every day in Lent, Monday to Saturday, I shall also provide a short Reflection on the main reading of the day. Keep an eye out in your Inbox for the email,

Revd Paul Eddy, Vicar.

Tel: 01367 710267 Email: vicar@stdenys.org.

www.stdenys.org