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**Sunday 19 April to Sunday 26 April**

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Sunday 19 April 2020

**God is our refuge**

by Ruth Olsen

**‘God is our refuge’ (Psalm 46:1).**

Read Psalm 46

What is a refuge? The dictionary says a refuge is ‘a shelter or protection from danger or trouble; … anything to which one has recourse for aid, relief, or safety'. A refuge offers safety and security.

We usually tend to think of a refuge as a place. Here we are reminded that our refuge is actually a Person. God is our place of refuge. That’s what he gives to any who seek him. We can run to him and discover we are safe, no matter what is happening.

Times of shaking like now around the world can pummel our sense of security. It’s a good time to consider: what am I holding on to? Where am I anchored? This **is** a season of ‘stormy weather’, and we don’t know its outcome.

But there is a Person who offers us refuge. It’s available to anyone. Jesus is the way to this refuge. He has opened that door to all. Anyone who trusts him and his love for us – loved all the way to even dying and rising for us, to break the power of sin, death and Satan for us – is already inside the refuge he gives, that he **is** for us.

The Bible describes Jesus as the Prince of Peace. The peace he gives is living, dynamic, all-calming, so-settling; a peace that the world can’t give (Isaiah 9:6; John 14:27).

**Lord God, thank you that you are my refuge. I am grateful. Amen.**

Monday 20 April 2020

**God is our strength**

by Ruth Olsen

**‘God is our … strength (Psalm 46:1).**

Read Psalm 46

Why is strength so important? Strength enables us to move, to do simple and even amazing things. Activity uses our strength, and prolonged activity can deplete our strength, yet rest allows for recovery time. Amazing!

It’s not only physical activity that requires strength. Emotional energy requires a supply of strength, and entertaining anxious thoughts will rob us of strength. What is happening in our thoughts can impact our whole person: our focus, feelings, attitudes and actions. Why not pause and assess the general focus of your thoughts even now. Are you focused on all the rapid, scary changes happening, or are you reminding yourself that ‘there is a bigger picture; God has not abandoned us; his grace is always sufficient to enable us face and work through whatever is happening’ in us, around us, wherever! (see 2 Corinthians 12:9,10).

It’s actually very healthy for us to recognise and acknowledge our weakness. By yielding our struggles and weaknesses to the Lord, we begin to discover how he meets us, helps us, and enables us to stand where we couldn’t otherwise stand – simply because we are looking to him, letting him be the focus of our attention instead of being distracted by ‘the wind and the waves’ howling and thrashing around us (Matthew 14:22-33).

Hear again Jesus’ invitation: ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened …’ (Matthew 11:28–30).

***Lord God, thank you that you are my strength. I am grateful. Amen.***

Tuesday 21 April 2020

**An ever-present help**

by Ruth Olsen

**‘God is … an ever-present help in trouble’ (Psalm 46:1).**

**Read Psalm 46**

Please pause and let that promise wash over you. Soak in it: our God is an ever-present help in trouble. What a relief! Because now is certainly a ‘time of trouble’ around the world. We are being reminded that we are not in control of what is happening.

The Psalms speak frequently of times of trouble. Times of trouble come to everyone, personally, but also corporately, like now. Read through the Psalms and see the writers pour out fears, struggles, anguish before the LORD. Yet also take note of how the writers come back to remind themselves that God is still in control, everything is still in his hands. Therefore, rest in trusting him.

For example, see Psalm 33: ‘… The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the people. But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations; (verses 10,11, emphasis added). Yes, even in this ‘season’ of upheaval, God is at work! Through Jesus we know that God’s heart is toward us! Jesus is God’s heart to us! Now, in our enforced time of ‘pause’, there is a fresh opportunity to take him at his word, to let it redirect our focus to his heart for us, and for others around us, including those who don’t know Jesus yet.

***Lord God, change our hearts. Thank you that you are an ever-present help. We are grateful. Amen.***

Wednesday 22 April 2020

**Though the earth give way**

by Ruth Olsen

**‘Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way … its waters roar and foam’ (Psalm 46:2,3).**

Read Psalm 46

By ‘dwelling’ in Psalm 46:1 for a few days, we’ve been reminded why we need not fear in this time of upheaval. And we’ve allowed time for the Holy Spirit to renew to us God’s love in our hearts. Through Jesus, day by day the Holy Spirit gives us hope and a future that God has prepared, available to any who trust him. And this hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us (Romans 5:5). Therefore, no matter what is happening, he will give us the courage, strength, and whatever needed to continue walking forward, into each new day. He goes before us, and he calls us to follow him.

That doesn’t mean we won’t feel scared. There will be challenges, probably different for each of us. But the Lord does not change. It’s his love that will drive out our fear (1 John 4:18), helping us learn to lift our focus to him, to give our fears, anxieties, concerns to him. He promises to never leave nor forsake us, and that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:5,8 NIV). Therefore, we can cast all our anxiety on him because he cares for us (1 Peter 5:7).

***Lord God, thank you that you never leave us. We are grateful. Amen.***

Thursday 23 April 2020

**The works of the Lord**

by Ruth Olsen

**‘There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God … God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day’ (Psalm 46:4a,5).**

Read Psalm 46

There is a ‘bigger picture’ surrounding us that we are mostly unaware of. Instinctively we are self-focused, part of the pull of sin that we need to contend with. We don’t tend to ask or think: ‘What is God working in and through the nations, and why might that be happening?’ We don’t see things from his perspective. There’s much that we don’t understand … until the Holy Spirit lifts the veil that blinds us (2 Corinthians 4:4) and enlightens the eyes of our hearts (Ephesians 1:17-21) to begin to see with new eyes. Even then, we see only in part (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Sin blinds and destroys. It separates us from God. But God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world (John 3:17). At the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly … God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6,8 NIV). That’s amazing grace, available to us every day!

The psalmist invites us to ‘Come and see the works of the LORD …’ (Psalm 46:8), and to learn to see from the Lord’s perspective. He loves people, and longs for us to trust him; even when storms rage, he holds us, and all things, in his caring hands.

***Lord God, thank you that you, the LORD Almighty, are with us. We are grateful. Amen.***

Friday 24 April 2020

**Be still**

by Ruth Olsen

**‘Be still …’ (Psalm 46:10).**

Read Psalm 46

It’s so hard for us to ‘be still’.  Many of us seem to have ‘ants in our pants’, always on the move. We have activities and responsibilities involving family, work, volunteering in the community, and the like. That is needed. But the stillness spoken of in Psalm 46 is an underlying peace, an inner attitude of reassurance and rest that entrusts our lives, situations and loved ones to the Lord, worked in us by the Spirit.

The pressures and storms in life can mightily distract us from entrusting ourselves and our situations into the Lord’s care. But they can also be the precise opportunity in which to intentionally choose to do so!

The Bible says, ‘Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God’ (Philippians 4:6). And, ‘Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you’ (1 Peter 5:7). And, as Jesus said to Martha who was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made for hosting guests, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things’ (Luke 10:38-42).

Many times over the years I have sensed the ‘inner quiet voice’ of the Spirit saying to me, ‘Child … you are worried about many things …’ and ‘Be still, and know (trust) me in this situation’.

***Lord Jesus, thank you that you meet us where we are at, and for your Spirit, our Helper. We are grateful. Amen.***

Saturday 25 April 2020

**Help us to see**

by Ruth Olsen

**‘Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations’ (Psalm 46:10,11).**

Read Psalm 46

What is the Lord speaking to your heart through these words? Hear his promises: ‘The LORD Almighty is with us’ (v11, NIV), and ‘the Lord of Heavens Armies is with us’ (NLT). Nothing is too difficult for him. He will be exalted among the nations, even as he works through people who trust him. Now is a time to put into action what we have learned from God’s word. His light shines through us, his love and compassion touches others through us.

‘Lord, help us see through your eyes.’

For it is God who works in us to will and to act according to his good purpose (Philippians 2:13). He asks us to trust him; he enables us to both choose (exercise our will) and do (our actions and speaking) in ways that honour Jesus and share God’s love and life with others. This is not by our effort or strength; it’s the Holy Spirit living and working in us who enables us to walk in a new way (Zechariah 4:6), to love others with God’s love that he has first given to us (1 John 4:19).

Join in the songs of worship and praise on YouTube. Let’s pray for and encourage others, as the Spirit leads us.

***Lord Jesus, Light of the world, shine your light through us. Help us, Holy Spirit. Bless you Lord God! Amen.***

Sunday 26 April 2020

**Facing fear – trust God**

by Pastor Kevin Bell

**‘Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me’ (Psalm 23:4).**

Read Psalm 23

In Psalm 23, David talks about trusting God when he opens up to God and talks about the valleys of life, or in other words the darkest and fearful times in life.

Trusting God does not mean we do not experience fear or pain. Trusting God does not mean we won’t go through troubles or crises. The reality of life means you can’t go around the valleys, or under the valleys, or over the valleys. You can only go through the valleys. That is when David encourages us to declare, ‘I will fear no evil’. It implies a reliance and trust in God’s strength, power, wisdom and goodness and to ask him to bring peace and comfort to our hearts. Often that will mean we have to say, ‘God, I don’t understand, but I have decided to cast off this fear onto you. I cannot do this of myself. I will trust you through Your Holy Spirit, who enables me. I will not take this fear back on myself, but I will leave it with you Lord.’

To trust God is to recognise that he is in control; it is to claim his promises, like those given to Isaiah:

*When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up – the flames will not consume you* (Isaiah 43:2).

God says, ‘I am with you every step in the valley. I will lead you through this. Will you trust me?’

***Father, when I walk through the valleys of life, I will not fear, for you are with me. Amen.***