***Thought for the Week***

Sunday 22nd March 2020

*The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms*.

*Deuteronomy 33:27* (NKJV)

Dear all,

As we walk into this new season together, may I invite you to reflect on these few words from Deuteronomy in the Hebrew Scriptures. We have this profound picture of the most amazing God, with arms that are eternally open and outstretched, ready to welcome, embrace, support, comfort, encourage and uphold us as a people that he deeply loves. This image of our all loving God is one that I’d like us to hold onto during these unusual and unsettling times. In our difficulties and disorientation, what great comfort and hope is ours as we lean into God.

Here, Moses declares that God is our dwelling place, our refuge, our home, our place of peace and safety. He is always there for his people, he is always watching over his people, he is always a loving home and warm embrace for us. And I don’t believe we are just to be comforted by the everlasting nature of God but we may also lean into God today, right now! He is the God of eternity and he is also the God of reality; God is real and near, very much close and present. The God ‘*in whom we live and move and have our being’* (Acts 17:28) is the God who upholds us and envelopes us in lavish love today. As we confidently sing in ‘*Great is thy Faithfulness*’, God is always a ‘*strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow*’ and this is exceedingly good news for such a time as this.

Let us lean into God.

I’m sure we all remember this wonderful old hymn:

*What a fellowship, what a joy divine,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms;  
What a blessedness, what a peace is mine,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.*

*Refrain:  
Leaning, leaning,  
Safe and secure from all alarms;  
Leaning, leaning,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.*

*Oh, how sweet to walk in this pilgrim way,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms;  
Oh, how bright the path grows from day to day,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.*

*What have I to dread, what have I to fear,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms?  
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.*

By E.A. Hoffman (1887)

CCLI 181784

May God richly bless you and your loved ones.

*Neil*

**A prayer for uncertain times**

*‘God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.’*  
Psalm 46:1, NRSV

As so much is re-shaped by Coronavirus Covid 19, let us pray with

people left unwell, beckoned by death or bereaved;  
people providing professional health care and advice, looking after loved ones at home or working to create treatments and cures;  
people shaping the response of nations and neighbourhoods, of commerce and industry, of service and voluntary organisations and of communities of faith;  
people who are anxious or afraid, alone or isolated.

Living, loving God,  
we praise you,  
and through times of peril we lean into you,  
for in Jesus Christ  
you have trodden paths as difficult as ours,  
revealing there a love that nothing defeats,  
a love that bears us through.

Even as we strive to behave responsibly,  
and to care reliably,  
so we feel after you  
that in these uncertain times we might trust you are with us,  
our refuge and strength,  
and our faith, hope and love might be renewed,  
through Jesus Christ,

Amen.

We also pray for one another at this time, especially for those among us who are in need.

We bring before you those who are sick, bereaved or struggling with life at the moment

and we hold in our prayers those within our Church family who find themselves placed

within the ‘vulnerable’ and ‘high risk’ groups.

Loving Lord, watch over them, and indeed, watch over us all in these disorientating days

and may we all find peace, strength and hope as we lean into you.

In Jesus’ name,

Amen.