

## Hope is born\_Preparing for Hope!

(Posted for 6th December)

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: **"I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way, a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"** And so, John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Mark 1:1-3

In Luke's Gospel we are given the back story to John the Baptist. John's forthcoming birth is announced by angel Gabriel whilst his father Zacharias was in service in the Temple. Zacharias was told, **"... your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John...For he will be great in the sight of the Lord...He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb."** He will go before God **"...to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."** John was to be born to Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth after many years of longing for a child, they were past childbearing but by this miraculous conception they were to see themselves as chosen by God to be part of God's incredible plan for the plight of humanity. John was born to be a herald, a messenger calling for change of heart as a preparatory means to receive his cousin, Jesus Christ the LORD.

In today's context I think of what a call for change might look like...I heard the song 'Wake Up Everybody' by chance recently and I thought about the many songwriter's and poets who have been heralds in our times. Just for reference I share a little of the song in question ...

**"Wake up everybody no more sleeping' in bed  
No more backward thinking' time for thinking' ahead  
The world has changed so very much  
From what it used to be  
There is so much hatred war and poverty  
Oh yeah**

**The world won't get no better  
If we just let it be  
The world won't get no better  
We gotta change it yeah,  
Just you and me"**

How does such a song resonate with us after the year we have had!! War still exists in many places and poverty has increased across the world as a result of the Pandemic. What can be defined as our 'wilderness'? A world affected by Corona where no continent has escaped its ravages – maybe?

A Voice of one calling in the Wilderness bears witness to our cry for change – an end to disease, death and poverty. Yet, at the same time, this voice answers the cries in the wilderness, in the deserted hard and difficult space of life and the solution offered requires hearers to prepare the way for hope to be born in the most unlikely places. The prediction of one crying in the wilderness was given around 700 years before the birth of John the Baptist and that of Jesus Christ. And this prophecy echoed through the centuries until Jesus 'birth, it continues to echo to this day...' **'PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD, PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD, PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD, PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD'**... It is an echo that is repeated every Advent.

Whilst we might seek a blanket change, the one we actually receive is a conversion that must begin with us, creating in each of us, hearts that move us to be change – makers. It is a conversion that moves within us to be the change we seek in the world around us. This is the cry of John the Baptist, the Messenger who calls for 'repentance', meaning nothing other than a call for the World to prepare themselves to receive the Message of the birth of Christ Child, God's gift to World. A Child born to give us hope, a hope that is fired from within with a confidence which not only sees a different future but also works tirelessly to see our hopes realised.

The Hope we crave at this time may well be an end to the Pandemic and life to return to some sort of normality, for something better. Do you have vision of hope for your future and the future of the World? Some may find conjuring such a vision too difficult a task, too hard to imagine a future different from today. Again, we are reminded that this is what hope is made of, the ability to see a better future which is different from today with every expectation that our vision will be a tangible reality. This is the power of the Baby in the manger, the ability to empower and resource humanity with God's ability to work for the change we cry out.

One final thought! Our Christmas celebrations of 2020 UK appeared threatened, as lockdown measures were enforced with restrictions were made on people gathering. However, we are reminded that Christmas is more than a popular celebration, it is God's gift of hope to be found in the person of Jesus Christ. We give witness through the scriptures that the 'echo' of coming change, conceived in the heart of God could not be halted by Herod's threat 2000 years. The first Christmas swept into the ordinariness of life with a myriad of extraordinary events and announcements and the Christ Child was born. He once and for all cemented forever the divine hope that we so need, in a dark world, the cry of hope in the wilderness. Whatever restrictions we face this Christmas we remain confident in the knowledge that we will always have Jesus Christ, once received He can never be removed from our hearts – therefore our Celebrations will always continue!!!

Let us prepare ourselves this Advent 2020 by suspending for a moment all that we know about life and living, jus for a moment so that we can be open minded, be open to a new world view, be open to seeing and understanding things in a new way, to seeing life through God's eyes ...

**Dear Father**

**May the message of the birth of Jesus Christ come to us again afresh, echoing new dimensions hope, preparing and changing us in ways that our hearts be renewed, inspired and motivated by your Holy Spirit to create change in wilderness and deserted spaces we encounter. May Jesus Christ be born again in our hearts this Christmas. Amen**

When Hope Came Down Kari Jobe  
Joy to the World

<https://youtu.be/bkeI8C2CJz0>  
[https://youtu.be/hlXe4\\_Mb1jM](https://youtu.be/hlXe4_Mb1jM)

## Practicing Gratitude in difficult times (2)

(Posted for 25th November)

"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

It is always easy to be thankful in times of great joy, happiness and success but how is it naturally possible to be thankful when things are difficult, during times of sadness and grief. Especially now when all seems chaotic and a virus plagues our World and people are dying in great numbers on a daily basis. Gratitude and thankfulness do not come naturally – it is an act of choice; it is voluntary and when practiced as daily habit it is found to have the ability to change our lives. There are benefits to Gratitude and Thankfulness.

It has long since been a spiritual discipline for Christians and other faiths and it is now scientifically recognised for the benefits. In the Old Testament it is recorded as a religious practice known as the 'Sacrifice of Thanksgiving' which is in fact a peace offering motivated by thanksgiving. The offering included animal sacrifice and presentation of types of bread and it was a voluntary offering offered by the giver as an expression of thanks to God. This particular offering was presented to God by the Priest in the presence of the giver who following the offering was given the remaining portion of meat and bread. He was then able to share his portion in a feast with friends and family on the same day. This offering of thanksgiving was a moment celebration which connected the giver in relationship to God and in the final instance he too became a beneficiary of the sacrifice presented. This voluntary offering pleased God and that which was freely given as a gift became a blessing to not only the giver but also to his wider network of family and friends. This religious rite is no longer a requirement or practice for Christians today because Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross however, there are principles here that can be carried forward into current everyday practices. That of sacrifice; the act of giving or doing something that is of personal cost for someone who is considered worthy of such a gift. That is done or given voluntarily which communicates a willing desire to express our thanks to God. These principles can be seen to honour God and benefit us at the same time.

Science recognises the benefits that Gratitude has upon our well-being, our state of mind and our general state of happiness. By expressing gratitude people acknowledge what is good and positive in their lives, not only in the good times but especially in the more difficult times of lives. Gratitude recognises the source of goodness beyond the self and connects humanity to something good and greater beyond humanity. Whether you consider yourself religious or non-religious the benefits of being thankful has been found to have a good and lasting effect upon our physical, emotional and mental state.

As the nation we have been rightly concerned about the multiple effects of 2 pandemic Lockdowns in just less than a year; we continue to carry concerns about the present and the future of our health; the health of the nation and the health of the World. Additionally, we are now faced with the busyness of preparing to exit this current Lockdown (2) on December 2<sup>nd</sup> and Christmas celebrations unlike any other we have recently known. However, the regular practice of Gratitude as a spiritual discipline will cause us to prayerfully stop for a moment each day, a moment when we turn outward, away from ourselves and begin to identify those good and positive things around us to be thankful for. When we do so we remember that our concentration on the things that we can identify as reasons to be thankful however great or small changes our focus, our feelings and outlook above those things that are more worrisome and prone to weigh us down.

**Today we would do well to place at the top of our Gratitude list ...**

- NHS; Consultants, Doctors, nursing staff, hospital workers of every grade and volunteers who are keeping our health facilities open.
- Keyworkers; Transport Workers, Delivery drivers, Street Cleaners and rubbish collectors, Supermarket Workers all those who are keeping the UK clean, moving and fed
- Police and Army personnel maintaining law and order
- Government; MP's, Local Councillors

**Thank you to all. Thank you for all that you are doing and will continue to do. Thank you for all that you do at risk to yourselves and families on our behalf. May you all know God's divine health, His good guidance, protection and wisdom during this time.**

How about we make the act of Gratitude a daily practice? Why not make it a family challenge? Whether religious or non-religious...We can introduce the idea to our children and make it a family practice. (See Link below – a Children's story about Gratitude)\* We can challenge each other online

or on the telephone to come up with 3 things to be thankful for...I leave you with this! What three things can you be thankful for today? \* <https://karenharveycox.wordpress.com/2008/04/04/the-thankful-coat/>

**Dear Lord, help us in these difficult times to always remember to find something to be thankful for. Help us to remember that a grateful heart is not only of personal benefit to us but that it also has the power to benefit those around us**

## Living Evergreen\_In Trust

(Posted for 22nd November)

**God's Message...** "Blessed is the man who trusts me, God, the woman who sticks with God. They're like trees replanted in Eden, putting down roots near the rivers—Never a worry through the hottest of summers, never dropping a leaf, serene and calm through droughts, bearing fresh fruit every season." **Jeremiah 17:7-8**

Today, we reflect on the idea that 'Trusting in God' comes loaded with blessing. It is clear from the above text that the theme of God's message to Israel is that of 'Trust' and the benefits associated with such an undertaking. How is 'trust usually defined'? What does Jeremiah 17:7-8 help us define what it is to 'trust' in God and how may it differ? One online dictionary defines **'Trust' as a 'firm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of someone or something'**

God tells us through Jeremiah that trusting in Him is far more than in his ability to do something, to act on our behalf, it is more than the support He offers. God has on many occasions presented Himself to Israel as trustworthy, truthful, reliable, a powerful and active means of support and protection. Yet here He reminds them again that Trust in Him is far from an empty activity, based on thought or decision alone. There is a sense that God draws the trusted parted into His very being so that they are found to be in an oasis of sustaining, lifegiving nourishment having the ability to flourish in situations that are contrary to growth and productivity. A decision to turn to God in 'Trust' connects an individual securely to Him. Much more than this, God tells Israel that they would be like an 'evergreen'; like 'a plant that retains green leaves throughout the year, like a person or thing of enduring freshness, success, or popularity. Such trust in Him would cause Israel to be productive and resourceful even in the harshest of situations. This is God's promise to Israel and to those who will go on to place their trust in Him.

However, God's message to Israel began with the opposite state of Blessedness with that of the state of being Cursed. Both states are determined by where God's people choose to place their 'Trust'; whether in Him or in others? **"Cursed is the strong one who depends on mere humans. Who thinks he can make it on muscle alone and sets God aside as dead weight? He's like a tumbleweed on the prairie, out of touch with the good earth. He lives rootless and aimless in a land where nothing grows."** The complete opposite of those who disregard God, trust their own strength and the strengths others. God declares their actions and movements to be Rootless, lacking in stability and unproductive

Jeremiah's message to Israel shows that being a believer in God doesn't automatically translate into a believer who trust God. It is possible to Believe in God and not trust Him, the danger for His Covenant people Israel; and Christian Believers is found when not trusting God leaves them open to sin; the failure to recognise His presence and reliability. By so doing they reject God and choose lesser help, ultimately finding themselves wanting. The choice before Israel and for Believers it seems is ever so simple; either we trust God, or we do not. Yet is it that simple? "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." There is both the believing that God exists and a confident expectation that he will reward such trust placed in Him. Here again, we see that 'belief' and 'trust' being a confident expectation in God can be separated.

An Old Testament Biblical story found in the Book of Ruth demonstrates very well the normally invisible distinction between Faith and Trust. They are not the same in meaning or experience but closely related as one is dependent on the other. The main character Naomi whose story we are given a window through which to peer,

has found herself completely destitute following the death of her husband and two sons. She is an immigrant in Moab, living through a period of great loss famine and as if there hope, it comes through the knowledge that there is food in her homeland, Bethlehem in Judah. Naomi decides to leave Moab and return home and Ruth, one of her daughter-in-laws; a Moabitess decides to return with her. Ruth gives up her homeland, all she knows and all religious affiliations and chooses God whom she until now, knows as Naomi's God.

They both arrive in Bethlehem and Naomi is greeted with much excitement from the people of her hometown however, Naomi's response is far from happy or excited. As they greet her by name, she replies, **"Don't call me Naomi...Instead, call me Mara for the Almighty has made life very bitter for me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me home empty. Why call me Naomi when the Lord has caused me to suffer and the Almighty has sent such tragedy upon me?"** When hard times hit, what happens to faith and trust in God? We see in the story that it had become very dark for Naomi; she even describes life as bitter and blames God for the tragedy that has now appeared in her life. Yet, we see that Naomi believed in God, His existence and His divine providence, care and control over life and life events however, her trust in Him and His good plans for her had been completely shattered. This we learn by her expression of how she now sees God's activity in her life. A little something to be said about mistrust, as justifiable and warranted such a response is in the circumstances, the inability to mentally rest, to see the good in the midst of the bad, negative thoughts and assessments of the situation. All added together prolongs the experience of suffering and anxiety opening also the door to look elsewhere or outside of God for a solution.

How did God deal with her mistrust? From the text we witness no punitive response from God, but would there be? No, for as we have learned that the willingness to 'Trust' relates to a matter of choice made by the 'nation' or the individual in question. As a Covenant keeping God, He will continue to work in our favour according to His divine purpose unless our choice leads us to place our confidence in others. He had great plans for Naomi and her wounded family. Trust in God speaks of the 'evergreen' state that produces good out of disastrous situations, Naomi though she doubted God's goodness had not chosen to trust in anyone other than Him. Naomi's mistrust had not disconnected her from God, He stepped in to perform life changing results in her life according to her appointed Destiny.

Beginning her new life Ruth spent her initial day working in the field, under religious law which makes provision for the poor to receive a portion of the Harvest especially put aside for them. This day revealed to Naomi something of God's activity in their lives, she sees God's Hand and changes her perspective as Ruth reports back, **"The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz. Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he of the Lord, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and the dead!"** Knowing the end of the story we know that whilst this story begins with a tragic set of circumstances, it was not the end but a moment of transition; a moment of rewrite, a moment of movement and opportunity in the hands of Destiny. A moment when God set out to create something new out of tragedy. Ruth, the Moabitess' marriage to Boaz results in the restoration of the legacy of Naomi's dead son, Ruth's husband. A further reward becomes visible much later, when we learn that Ruth, the Moabitess is named as an ancestor of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. What a miracle of Destiny? What has God got in store for you and me as we continue to trust in Him, even in times of great questioning?

As we face uncertain times, where are you placing your trust? It may be time for a check ...Evergreen or tumbleweed? Productive or idle and uncreative? Serene and calm or anxious and worried? Jeremiah's delivers God's Message to Israel identifying that there is a choice to be had in times of challenge, careful to present both sides... which state will you choose today? Clearly Church there are benefits to Trusting God.

**Dear Father, continue to draw us to yourself through these trying times, may our questions, our doubt and fatigue be quieted as you sustain us and strengthen our willingness to remain, to look for your activity and place our trust in you to bring us through into a fruitful and productive end. Amen**

Great is Thy Faithfulness  
Oceans by Hillsong

<https://youtu.be/2eQ1oal44wU>  
[https://youtu.be/dy9nwe9\\_xzw](https://youtu.be/dy9nwe9_xzw)

| **Mid-Week Prayer**

**The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He thrusts out your enemies before you; it is he who cries, 'Destroy them!' Deuteronomy 33:27**

The Picture which we are being given through the words of this text in Deuteronomy is one of the Immortal, ever living God; as a safe place, an asylum for those who are fleeing danger or in need of protection. Not only does God give Himself as a shelter, He also gives His 'Everlasting Arms' as a means of support beneath those in need. It offers seekers the sense of a 'firm footing' and the ability to take a stand with courage and confidence. Words like 'everlasting' and 'eternal' tell us that the refuge and arms offered possess properties far beyond all that which we know or can imagine, existing within the realm of the divine and the extraordinary. His 'Arms', in particular revealing supernatural strength which has the power to lift us emotionally and spiritually above those circumstances that threaten, cause distress, concern or worry.

As well as becoming our place of refuge and supernatural support, God drives away our enemies and declares their ultimate destruction. Changes and shifts in our circumstance rests very much upon how much we believe in God's words, His promises and how complete our faith is in His ability to deliver on all that He proclaims. We will find as the Hymn states intimacy, an assurance of safety, security and peace.

Today as we pray, we place before God all that concern and threaten for Him to provide us with a powerful sense refuge and peace that we need. To provide us with the security, assurance and courage we need to face difficulties before us

Pandemic; its effects, its end

The Bereaved

The NHS

Those suffering Covid19 Vaccines

The UK Government

Economic recovery

Financial resilience for those affected by job loss and furlough

Continued sense of community as we live through Lockdown 2

Below are Words of an old and popular Hymn, 'Everlasting Arms' written in 1887 by A. Showalter and E. Hoffman inspired by the above text found in Deuteronomy. Written as a means of comfort and encouragement to those suffering loss and difficulty.

1. 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

Chorus

Leaning, leaning  
Safe and secure from all alarms  
Leaning, leaning  
Leaning on the everlasting arms

2. 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

What a Fellowship, What Joy Divine

<https://youtu.be/d090G6A9cYE>



# On Christ the Solid Rock

(Posted for 15th November)

**“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” Matthew 7:24-27**

We are approaching the countdown to Christmas and many wonder if we will even experience Christmas as we have done in the past. Increase in Covid 19 numbers have forced us as a nation to repeat another Lockdown. We have entered Lockdown 2, under strict measures which curtail our liberties and even threaten forthcoming Christmas celebrations if measures are not eased or lifted. When will this Pandemic end? How will we recover economically? What about jobs? Will we ever return to normal? Will the vaccine put an end to Covid 19? Questions and more questions...many may say, we need a miracle! We need a Saviour! The Christmas Story will remind the world of God's answer to our needs. But for now, we move beyond the Christmas to consider how we can be strengthened in this present moment. Where does the strength we need come from to face crisis?

Jesus began to preach and to say, “repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” According to Matthew's Gospel this was His introductory statement before His launch into the Sermon on the Mount. What could He mean? The Kingdom of Heaven requires its hearers to come with an open mind, to come with a willingness to have our minds and attitudes changed; to learn, to receive new knowledge that has the power to change lives. This is Jesus' claim, ‘The Kingdom of Heaven has the power to the change lives of its hearers through the Words of Christ’.

How are we to come to the Kingdom? Jesus is even more explicit about our attitude, He says, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:3-4). We are to come with an attitude of a child, the attitude of a learner.

In today's text, Jesus shares a Parable as part of His Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:24-27. This Parable is repeated in a slightly different form in Luke 6:4:49. Yet, in both texts, Jesus presents the image two types of people, representing two types of responses; The wise and the foolish builder, the one who hears Jesus' words and acts upon it and one who hears does nothing. Beginning, firstly with the wise builder, it is good to appreciate the biblical meaning of wisdom used in text. ‘*Phrónimos*’, (Greek) used to mean ‘wise’ in the text means control which is ‘managed from the inside out’. Put another way, spiritual wisdom received influences inner views and opinions whilst regulating visible actions and behaviour.

So, our wise builder hears the words of Jesus and acts upon them, s/he digs down deep, beginning at the lowest place knowing that they will need something strong to underpin and to support their structure. The wise builder takes the time and works to lay a foundation. A person is like a building, like a spiritual house taking care to fortify themselves with the teachings of Jesus, taking on the work of learning and re-educating themselves so that their inner world, their minds are soaked and changed by the wisdom it offers. When difficulties arise all the work undertaken by the wise builder is revealed as strength to withstand, strength to endure, strength to survive. Jesus' words have built an internal reinforcement that is tested in times of adversity. Where is the wisdom in building a foundation? The

wisdom is knowing that additional reinforcement is needed in time of crisis. What reinforcement do you have to face the storms in your life? Can it/they be counted upon 100%?

Our foolish builder will have the same access to Jesus' words, s/he hears and reads Jesus' Words but upon hearing is unmotivated or in some cases do not understand that further work is required. They fail to understand that the building work required is one of learning, of becoming a student so as to understand what is heard. Without such work, there can be no inner change, no inner strengthening and that would produce the level of inner management needed to endure when storms come.

The difference between the two builders will be revealed in the day of trouble. Will we stand or crumble? The challenge presented to us by this Parable is, to keep working in the field of wisdom so that we are 'ahead of the game'. What are we doing with what we read and hear of Jesus' words? Are we approaching texts as child learners, seeking to understand further through study and prayer? Have we understood that spiritual wisdom is gained through our continual learning and re-education brought about by study of Jesus' words? Our study will prove that His Words has the power to not only change us; our minds, our attitudes and our behaviours but also the ability to strengthen us – enabling us to survive uncertain times and difficulties that come our way.

Are you a builder? How are you standing or crumbling?

It is never too late to start, and as with the concept of continual learning we can access God's Word at any time and at any age - the marks are revealed in times of adversity. One final point should we find ourselves crumbling we are reminded that we are never left wanting or hanging, ***"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."*** James 1:5

My Hope is Built on Nothing Less  
In Christ Alone

<https://youtu.be/rkMapZB8qMk>  
<https://youtu.be/rkMapZB8qMk>

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(Posted for 12th November)

## | Prayer ...

**Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me,  
for in you I take refuge.**

**I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings  
until the disaster has passed. Psalm 57:1**

David is a man on the run, seeking to escape the hateful and murderous threats of King Saul. The Psalm is penned by David documenting his distress and experience as an open prayer, a psalm that many have been grateful to have access to... how do you pray when in distress? How do we share our emotions with God? Is it okay to be completely honest with God about our feelings? We learn from the reading of the Psalm in full, that in the midst of distress and disaster David still found room in his heart to praise God.

David is a man in trouble and by his opening lines we sense that his back is against the wall and only God can help him now. David had been on the run for some time, this we understand from the story recorded in 1 Samuel 21-23. God is His only hope. David cries out for mercy and protection; he pleads for a favourable hearing and an offer of God's defence and shelter from danger.

I take refuge 'under the shadow of your wings'; a phrase used in a number of the Psalms; Jesus also uses similar imagery in Luke 13, He state, *"how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings."* As we return to the picture of a 'winged creature' that David shares with us, it opens for us the question of what image does his words conjure for us personally? I imagine an extraordinarily huge fearsome bird with an enormous wingspan. An image of something that would not only seem protective but also generate a feeling within me of assured safety, offering undisputable protection.

Beyond this imagery, Biblical commentary provide another means to understand the meaning of the phrase, 'under the shadow of your wing.' This can be found in Exodus 25 and 37 relating to the 'Ark of Covenant.' *"And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover. Make one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other; make the cherubim of one piece with the cover, at the two ends. The cherubim are to have their wings spread upward, overshadowing the cover with them. The cherubim are to face each other, looking toward the cover. Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the tablets of the covenant law that I will give you. There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the covenant law, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites."* Exodus 37:18-22

Between the wings of the Cherubims of gold is the cover of the 'Ark of Covenant'; the designated meeting place of God with humanity. God would communicate there with the High Priest "under the wings of the Cherubims" – under the wings of what is also known as the mercy seat. Mercy and God's favour is to be found under the wings of the Cherubims, it is a legitimate and tangible place which David could have been referring to – a place that God had designed for the High Priest to go alone on behalf of humanity to meet with Him and receive a favourable response. However, through Jesus Christ's death on the Cross we have a High Priest who has opened wide the door for not just one person but for all who believe and come in the name of Jesus.

*"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God...For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses...Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."*

In 'our time of need' and 'until the disaster has passed' are two states that we can relate currently. Here we are again, just a few months after the end of the first lockdown we are a few days into lockdown 2. What we thought was ending seems to threaten us with new vigour all over again. We may not be on the run from like David from a murderous individual but none the less we are being threatened by an invisible enemy. Let us go under the shadow of God's wings and boldly ask for His mercy and favour on behalf of our nation, our world as it moves through the grip of this pandemic – let us pray for God's divine protection and covering until this disaster passes... Yes Lord, have Mercy upon us!!!



The idea is repeated again elsewhere in the form of a prophesy spoken by the High Priest, who without fully understanding the nature of his words understood the impact and influence Jesus' death would have **"...You don't realize that it's better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed...led to prophesy that Jesus would die for the entire nation, And not only for that nation, but to bring together and unite all the children of God scattered around the world"** *John 11:50*

Jesus did lay down His life for humanity and His sacrifice was the gift of Salvation; the great doorway and opening to the reconciliation of all humanity to God their Creator, not just for the nation of Israel but to the whole world. One life dying to produce a great harvest for all; for all those who would recognise and acknowledge God as Creator and Father of all humanity, through the communication of the Gospel. One life willingly giving up their life to death so that the many would reap the benefit of a better life in God.

Many years ago, I attended a presentation given by a speaker from the British Legion, the representative spoke of Service Men and Women having to write their final letters to loved ones. Letters penned as they considered their own end before even beginning the task ahead of them on the Battlefield; letters they would imagine being given to their spouses and loved ones following their death. Naive as this may sound, I am haunted to this day by the fact that the call to duty on behalf of your Country requires a person to think of not returning to loved ones before ever leaving. The wrench, the brokenness that I feel as a as a third party opens my heart to see the gravity of calling on the lives of these brave souls'. They go out on our behalf willingly, each service man and woman, ahead of us, today to protect our tomorrow. Our Soldiers have in death or by returning home with or without visible injury, gave their today so that their nations reap a harvest of a 'peaceful' tomorrow borne of their sacrifice of love – A wonderful gift of peace that finds its expression through the miracle of greater love, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, His death on the Cross for humanity.

- The Cross of Calvary call us to remember the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who gave His life so that humanity has peace with God; the Father of All
- The Red Poppy calls for us to remember Service Men and Women who gave their lives, sacrificing their today for our tomorrow

**PRAYER** "O God of truth and justice, we hold before you those whose memory we cherish, and those whose names we will never know. Help us to lift our eyes above the torment of this broken world and grant us the grace to pray for those who wish us harm. As we honour the past, may we put our faith in your future; for you are the source of life and hope, now and for ever." Amen

Hymn Abide with Me Military Wives Choir

<https://youtu.be/4J-oP1esgt4>

Hymn Be Still My Soul

<https://youtu.be/mq59iE3MhXM>