

This Scot continues to struggle with the heatwaves! I've decided the cold is easier than the heat. We can put extra layers on; decency only allows us to take so many off and there are only so many cold showers you can take in a day. I've sometimes sat in the car to get the benefit of the a/c and sleeping can be a struggle with muggy nights. I've enjoyed the cold relief going into shops, only to forget how hot it is when stepping outside. Most of us say "where can I get relief!?" As we've acknowledged many times, life is very difficult for some of us. As a Church Family it can feel like we're going through the mill.

11 Psalms are titled as authored by the sons of Korah. (Korah rebelled against Moses in the wilderness, but his sons didn't join in, but their descendants bore the honoured name "Sons of Korah". They served in the Tabernacle and eventually the Temple. The Prophet Samuel is listed as a descendant of of Korah.) Some of the most loved Psalms were penned by the sons of Korah – people who knew the importance of grace and depending on God. Perhaps one of the most famous is Psalm 46 with its incredible opening line: *"God is our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in trouble"*. Just like the overbearing heat needs relief, so the Psalmist experiences trouble and needs a refuge. Whilst we don't know the context, it's probably an attack on Jerusalem. While other voices are urging to put hope in the strength of the stone walls and the military capacity of Israel, the Sons of Korah see God is above all those things. *"He makes wars cease...he breaks the bow and shatters the spear"*. God's refuge and strength are beyond the enemies that invade or the trouble that destroys our peace. Not only does he defeat the enemy, but will end any capacity to wage war on us again.

In a heatwave it's difficult to get away from the wilting heat, the sons of Korah found it difficult to get away from the storms, and it's hard to get relief from what troubles us. But instead of despairing, the Psalmist *"will not fear"* – even if *"the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the sea"*! Not because the storm isn't real, not because they are closing their eyes, but in the face of that fearful worst case scenario: *"God is our refuge and our strength"*. The chaos of our world can be overwhelming. We may be facing serious, life changing or threatening situations – health, relationships, financial worries. Are we afraid? No wonder! Living in a broken world is scary. Some of us fly to the worst-case scenario; anxiety crippling us. For some of us our experience has been – *is* – so traumatic that we can't even grasp it ourselves, yet the damage from that trauma infects every part of life. The Psalmist doesn't deny the reality of the situation but reminds us *"The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress"* The idea that the LORD Almighty himself is with us is an incredible one. Not that he wishes us well, not that he's thinking about us or even sending Angels to attend us. He himself is with us. This is a major theme in Scripture. In the Exodus, God's Presence goes with Israel – in the fiery pillar at night and the pillar of smoke by day – and the Tabernacle is God's dwelling place. But this is a limited Presence in the Old Testament and prophecy points to something far more. In John's opening verses we're told Jesus "became flesh and dwelt among us", literally Tabernacle-ing with us. In John 14 Jesus confuses the disciples on talking of his death. *"My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* In telling them he needs to leave; he shares the purpose of leaving – to prepare a place for us and a promise that he desires them to be with him. Indeed, he'll prepare heaven for them and return to take them to dwell with him forever. The *Tabernacling* of Jesus becoming and living his human life doesn't end with his death and resurrection. As he assures them, he won't leave us as orphans and will send the Holy Spirit to live in our hearts, while he sits at the right hand of the Father – in some senses continuing to prepare a place for us – to then take us to dwell with

him in Glory. Isn't it incredible that even now in all the peace, bliss and perfection of heaven, Jesus is longing, yearning, for us to join him there.

Here's where we come to the central verses of Psalm 46 (v4-7). Whilst the Psalmist thinks on Jerusalem, he's also looking to the spiritual Jerusalem of heaven. *"There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells."* Compare this to John's vision in Revelation 21:22-26 and 22:1-5. There's the river flowing through the city, the walls are impenetrable, but the gates are open because the threat has gone, because God's dwelling is with us. No temple is needed because of God's eternal presence and fellowship with creation has been restored and renewed through the finished work of Jesus; all things are made as new. The Psalmist isn't just saying – it'll all work out in the end so don't be afraid. Of course, there is truth in that! But he offers a real, here and now assurance that helps us in the storm: 1) God **is** our refuge and strength 2) The greatest disasters may come but we don't need to be afraid: because of point 1. 3) God dwells with us and will never abandon us 4) God is more powerful than all against us, THEREFORE 5) "Be still and know that I am God;" Ultimately, heaven will see us face to face with God, where the battles of life are over and the victory won. But here, now, in our every day, the assurance is it's all ours now too. Not that the storms will cease, but that they cannot destroy us, that God is with us in them. Lastly, I'm reminded of Moses's words just before he died: "The eternal God is your refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms." (Deut 33:27) The God who is our refuge is eternal, so the refuge he offers is eternal (now and always), and that he carries us through every joy and every heartache, whether we're aware the everlasting arms are underneath or not. Let's pray for ourselves – and each other – that we'd know the truth of "God is our refuge and our strength". Not only that but that everyone who is looking for a refuge, a relief would find it in God and know that stillness and peace that comes not from exhaustion, false hope or avoidance, but comes from knowing that He is the God who carries us.

Your friend, brother and Minister, Roo