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Weathering the storm

Because of a quirk of the calendar, I'm writing this introduction on Monday morning. From the comfort of my sofa I can see snow-covered roofs, blue sky and sunshine, the remnants of Sunday's weather. It looks lovely now; that wasn't quite my experience yesterday when I - and a number of others - were caught out by a change in the forecast and I found myself having to drive home through north Leicestershire down an ungritted A6 in falling snow...

As Elizabeth helpfully reminds us in today's reflection, the Bible often uses adverse weather as a metaphor for the unexpected challenges that life throws at us. Yesterday, driving at 30mph in third gear on national speed limit roads, following the tracks made by the car in front and second-guessing every decision about road positioning and changing gear felt not dissimilar to whole weeks, even months, during the early part of the pandemic as individually and collectively we navigated a part through unprecedented circumstances.

It's hard to find a place of stillness under those circumstances, but Elizabeth's reflection challenges us to do just that.

Thanks to all those who took me at my word last week and dropped us an email to let us know how you're doing! Please do keep in touch; we know life continues to be tough and we'd love to celebrate your small wins and pray for your big challenges.

Go well!

Louise, on behalf of the Arthur Rank Centre team

Be still and know

Bible reading: Psalm 46

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

Selah

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.

The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Selah

Come, behold the works of the Lord;
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.
'Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth.'
The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Selah

Reflection

At first sight, this doesn't seem to be a particularly rural psalm, with its focus on Jerusalem. But we need to remember that Jerusalem was about the temple, and the temple was a tangible sign of the presence of God. Where do we see God today? Perhaps as we walk in the countryside, listen to the birds, or watch the clouds scudding above us.

Wherever it is, we need that sense of God's presence more than ever as COVID-19 continues to shape our world. It can feel as if the mountains are indeed shaking, the seas roaring and foaming. We too must find our refuge and strength in the God who created us.

The first response in a crisis for many of us is to go into overdrive to try and sort things out. That is not sustainable: COVID-19 has been with us for nearly a year, so it is no wonder that so many of us feel exhausted. We must find ways to 'be still and know that I am God' as the psalmist reminds us.

Think of the seasons. In the winter it can feel as if nothing much is happening; the trees are leafless and the soil is bare. Yet at this point so much is going on that we cannot see. In the spring this pent-up energy breaks forth as buds and shoots emerge. It is the same for us: resting in God and taking time out will resource us to continue with what God has called us to do. This week find time to 'be still and know that I am God.'

Response

Why not:

- Go for a walk and take time to stop and look?
- Do something that nourishes you?
- Read Psalm 46 each day this week, taking time to be still?

Prayer

Loving God

You have called us each by name,

and hold us in the palm of your hands.

You love us just as we are.

Help us to remember that everyday so

that we may be able to share that love with others.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Revd Elizabeth Clark, National Rural Officer for the Methodist and United Reformed Churches