

21st February 2021 – First Sunday in Lent

Defence

“For thou, Lord, art my hope: Thou has set thine house of defence very high.”

Bible, Psalm 91:9

Scattered along the East Lothian coast there are any number of two-metre square concrete blocks, high on the shoreline, now largely hidden in the undergrowth. These are the remains of World War II defences, a protection against the landing of tanks on the shallow beaches of the Forth estuary, a barrier to ensure there was a defence against invasion.

Is it OK to say that God is our defence? Of course it is! The Psalmist clearly thought so in Psalm 91, and it's a metaphor that still matters. We know it's naïve to say God will protect us from everything – illness, tragedy and even the reality of death. But the image of God as our defence, in whose presence we feel safe and secure, is surely one that's important.

Isaac Watts, “the father of Christian hymnody”, didn't get off to a good start. Displaying a propensity for rhyme at an early age, he was once asked why he had his eyes open during prayers, to which he responded:

A little mouse for want of stairs ran up a rope to say its prayers.

only to receive a beating for his cheek! However, his prayerful retort was:

O father, father, pity take, and I will no more verses make.

Clearly undaunted, Watts went on to write one of his greatest hymns in 1708, this time based on Psalm 90, which opens with these verses:

*O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home;*

*Under the shadow of thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is thine arm alone,
And our defence is sure.*

God's arm is sufficient for our defence. As this Season of Lent continues, it's good to remember that safety and security in God's “eternal home” is ours to enjoy, in ages past and in all our years to come.

A prayer for today

Loving God, thanks for being my defence, especially when I need to feel safe. Amen.

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>