

Wendy's June Prayer Thoughts

This June peoples in the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth, will share with Queen Elizabeth¹¹ in the Jubilee Celebrations to mark the 70 years of her reign and royal service. Recently Queen Elizabeth decided that Windsor Castle would be her personal and working residence. This ancient castle, set on a steep chalk cliff overlooking the River Thames, was founded in 1075 by William the Conqueror, after the Norman Conquest. It was built as a fortress to defend the western approach to London. King Henry¹ was the first to use it as a residence. Windsor Castle holds the record of being the longest occupied castle in Europe, and the world, with a total of 39 monarchs to date. It is a magnificent structure with its dominant feature being the central Round Tower, erected by William the Conqueror's grandson, Henry¹. The 200 steps can still be climbed for a view over the city. Today it houses the royal archives. Royal apartments were added by Henry¹¹. Henry¹¹¹ erected the great D shaped Curfew Tower in the late 1220's, at the western end. Since 1447 it has been the Bell Tower for St George's Chapel housing 8 bells on a massive timber frame, and a clock replaced in 1689 is still in working order. Opposite the clock are two arched windows out of which people were hung. Curfew Tower also contains a sally port, a secret exit for the occupants to furtively exit in a time of siege. Throughout the centuries extensions and restorations have taken place. In our time we have witnessed the work carried out on 20% of the Castle - St George's Hall, 9 staterooms, also private apartments all in the East Wing - severely damaged by the enormous fire of November 1990, It began by a faulty spotlight igniting a curtain next to the altar in the Private Chapel dating from Queen Victoria's reign, completely gutting it.

During the Civil War (1642-1651) Cromwell's Parliamentary Troops made Windsor Castle their HQ. and a prison for Royalists. They held Charles¹ captive in the dungeons prior to his execution. In this period of upheaval the Long Parliament voted to demolish the Castle. The motion was defeated by a single vote! Windsor Castle has been a place of safety for two queens. Queen Elizabeth¹ took refuge with her Royal Court to avoid contagion from an outbreak of plague in 1653. A 1,000 were dying weekly in London alone, besides its spread to other areas. During the Luftwaffe bombing of London in WW¹¹ there was a mass evacuation of children from the city. The Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret were sent to Windsor Castle. When there was a bomb scare, they were taken down into the dungeons for extra protection. Buckingham Palace was struck 16 times. With the outbreak of the Covid pandemic, Queen Elizabeth¹¹ made it her place of safety, as she self isolated according to the regulations, along with Prince Philip.

In the Old Testament. towers were erected not simply to architecturally stand out, but to be places of refuge and safety. As strongholds, they offered protection from approaching enemies. They gave the defenders the high ground placing them above their attackers. Ancient cities were surrounded by walls to safe guard their citizens. If the walls were breached, people could run to the tower for safety. God's name is a place of safety so the writer of Proverbs affirmed. "The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; the religious run to it and are safe." 18:10. how comforting is this thought as we turn to prayer. We are coming to God, God who is always a safe place for us to be, no matter what condition or circumstances we find ourselves in. We run to Him because we want to be connected in fellowship, and we find God is waiting to embrace us.

King David often proved this to be so during his lifetime. He wrote of his experience in the Psalms. Often his enemies were close on his heels and ready to attack. He found time to pray as he trusted in God the stronghold. "For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my help is from him. He alone is my rock, and my salvation, my fortress, I shall not be shaken. 62:5-7. I

Quote a part from the Message. "My help and glory are in God - granite - strength and safe harbour - God. So trust him, absolutely people; lay your lives on the line for him. God is a safe place to be." When we pray we place ourselves under God's protection knowing like David, that **He is our refuge**. Then we trust ourselves to His care by laying our lives before Him. God is always ready to listen and help.

Martin Luther, the great reformer, lived with threats to his life for years. Pope Leo X excommunicated him for heresy in 1520, because he taught that salvation was received through the grace of God, not by buying indulgences. The next year he was summoned before Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms. He was told to recant, but doggedly refused. On his way home he was intercepted by soldiers belonging to the Duke of Saxony who took him into hiding in Wartburg Castle, where he remained for a year. When fear or discouragement assailed him he asked a friend to read Psalm 46. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear." He wrote, "We sing the psalm to the praise of God, because God is with us....Whatever problems rage against us know that God is a mighty fortress. God's spirit is ever flowing to sustain us and give us gladness when under siege." The same thought is the basis for his hymn Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott, The first lines translated by F.H. Hedge are, "A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing" A bulwark is something that cannot be broken. Thomas Carlyle's translation begins, "A safe stronghold our God is still." Whenever we pray to God our refuge, we receive strength emotionally and spiritually. Safe in His security we receive His calming peace.

Towers are safe places, because they are places from which watch is constantly kept. When troubles descend on us God is already alerted, and is standing strong and powerful for us as the prophet Jeremiah discovered. "O Lord, my strength, my stronghold, my refuge in the day of trouble." 16:19. God knows our every move, the troubles we face, our fears our distress. We need not panic. **God is our safe place**, or to use another metaphor from Proverbs, "He (God) is a shield to those who take refuge in Him."