

Isaiah 40:21-31

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

I just got back from Hawaii in the past few days. For my husband and another couple who traveled with us, it took planning and saving, but it was worth it to see another place on the globe, experience the culture of not just one, but four of the islands, and learn more about history, both of people and the land itself. Hawaii is interesting because it is a series of islands created from the eruption of volcanoes in history, and that creation is continuing in the present time as in 2018 the volcano that erupted on the Big Island created more land mass. It is also a land where the older islands are slowly being eroded away and far into the future, not in our time, the oldest islands without any active volcanos will disappear.

The place was so very different from my experience as a person living with four seasons in a country that offers its own diversity of plants, animals, soil and land formations. Palm trees, all kinds of flowers blooming fragrant and colourful, the sun setting so quickly you can watch it dropping from the sky in a matter of minutes as it disappears against the horizon. I had the opportunity to go snorkeling for the first time and seeing the amazing colours, shapes, and sizes of schools of fish, just below the surface, was truly amazing. Then to reflect and realize that this was all created.

In Isaiah the writer speaks about the one who "sits above the circle of the earth...who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them [the stars] like a tent to live in." We are then told to "Lift up our eyes on high and see. Who created these stars? Isaiah's answer, God who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing." God is creator of the earth that we experience as we walk on the land, look up into the heavens, and even when we peer beneath the surface of the waters.

This God, our God, knows the stars, and if we look at the Gospel of Luke 12:7 we read more affirmation of how important all of creation is to God. "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows." In the Gospel of Matthew 6:29-30 we asked to "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet [we are told] even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe [us]."

I share all this because it is crucial to understand that God cares about creation and about people when one reads this passage from Isaiah. You see the people to whom

Isaiah wrote were in exile under the cruel rule of the Babylonians. They felt that God had abandoned them. God had seemed silent for years as they suffered, taken from their homeland, dispersed and scattered among people who did not care about the Hebrew peoples' one God. The conquerors had done their worst and their gods had seemingly proven that they were more powerful than the God of the Hebrew people.

This passage at verse 21 comes on the heels of the questions about the idols of the Babylonians. These verse of 18-20 say,

“To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compares with him?

An idol? – A workman casts its, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold, and casts for it silver chains.

As a gift one chooses mulberry wood – wood that will not rot – then seeks out a skilled artisan to set up an image that will not topple.

In other words, these gods, these idols are all crafted by people, how then can they be the creator. So, Isaiah writes, “Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?” These are rhetorical questions, as of course the Hebrew people did know about God who is one, who created all things. They were being reminded to look at their history, to trust in the God who had always been, is now, and will always be.

Still, we all know how difficult it is to believe in God when everything around us seems to say there is no God. We find ourselves in ruin, disease taking it toll on our own or a loved one's body, wars raging even in our own time, food and housing insecurity for many, racism, bigotry, unemployment all having an effect on people worldwide. And it is especially difficult to hold onto the thought that there is a god who cares when our lives are challenging and we are struggling. Even the church which we hold onto as a place for God is in a time of transition. This is challenging nearly every congregation to consider whether or not it can continue to exist and be viable and what choices need to be made in order for people to be faithful stewards of what God has given us.

We often forget that in this time of exile for the Jewish people that the temple had been destroyed and was in ruins for years, yet God brought back the people, slowly, and a new temple was created. It was not exactly like the first but it was still a place to worship. We tend to forget the challenges that the people faced, for starters, even though they were in exile, it was an exile they knew, things some two hundred years after the exile began, well, they were different in the land of Judah. Things were in ruin, it would take a lot of time, effort, knowledge, and courage to go back, especially knowing that things would be different, and not everyone was up for that.

We look at our own experiences in life and also find it difficult to remain certain or even hopeful that God is at work, still creating, still transforming our lives and working in the world. We get tired and weary. We lose hope and strength, strength both physically and

mentally. We forget that God is the creator and God's strength does not grow faint or weary.

We hear the words "Have you not known? Have you not heard?" in verse 21 in response to God's creating and being greater than anything or anyone else. It is the big picture God. We hear the words again in verse 28 after the people wonder about God in their lives, when they express their feelings of being forgotten and disregarded. "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The answer this time,

The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Whatever is happening in your life, whatever is happening in the world, with our church, with anything, we are to wait on the Lord who is the Creator. The One who does not grow weary, who does not forget the people God created, who clothes us, who counts and names not only the stars of the sky, but knows us by name. Our God has not ever abandoned us or disregarded us.

Waiting on God is difficult. Sometime we don't understand how God is at work, but we can trust that God is at work. Waiting on the Lord does not mean that struggle is necessarily removed or all things will get better. It does not mean that everything we want or hoped for will happen. Yet waiting on the Lord gives strength in ways that are more subtle, harder to grasp and understand and yet when experienced, when our strength is renewed, we continue on our life journey being transformed, about to move with God, our spirits able to soar above the struggle like an eagle, with hearts able to run and not be weary, and walk and not faint.

May you know the creating, renewing God with you today as individuals and as people in community. Amen.