

Isaiah 40:27-31
Galatians 6:7-10

We Are Weary

Part of verse 31 from Isaiah 40 has always stood out for people. Not surprisingly, it is the line that reads "they shall mount up with wings like eagles." All one has to do is imagine an eagle in flight, their wing span so majestic, their flight seemingly effortless as they catch even the slightest breeze and soar high above. It gives us pause and we watch in awe. This can be in our imagination, or watching on a screen, or if lucky enough, one might get to see that majesty in motion in nature.

There is something promising in thinking that those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles. It is a hope filled image in a ravaged and struggling world where people are tired. Tired of fighting illness or the challenges of old age. A world where personal wars are waged for those who are struggling with addiction or mental health issues, and a continual challenge for those who walk alongside them as family or in professional fields of work.

People are tired of family fights and broken relationships. Tired of having to work so hard to make ends meet and then hearing the news that food costs are going to continue to rise along with all other aspects of managing a household. Even people who thought retirement was going to be a wonderful endless opportunity to rest when they felt like it, find that other demands seem to fill up their time.

We have regional and national concerns of affordable and accessible healthcare and education for all. And just the other evening the news spoke of the challenges of equitable policing in our country and province. Then there are the global concerns of power, politics, war, famine, refugees, the list is endless.

We are weary.

We are weary of the burdens we carry, whatever they are and whatever the cause. Few people seem to have boundless energy. Grief, pain, sorrow, losses of many kinds wear us down and we wonder does it ever ends.

I wish I could tell you it does. But it doesn't. To be human is to struggle. To be human also means laughter, joy, and at times peace, but there is always the struggle. There are always times of being weary. The weariness can bear upon us mentally, emotionally, physically, and even socially.

The book of Isaiah is written to and about a weary people. People taken captive under the brutal rule of the Babylonian empire. Taken from their homeland, everything they

held dear destroyed. We don't have to look far to know those kinds of images. Just watch people in Gaza as they fight one another for food, or the destruction of the Ukraine. Not to mention the losses, frustration, and fear of those who are leaving South America and other countries in hopes of finding a future for themselves and their families in a foreign land and without the security of knowing that their hopes will ever come to fruition.

The people of Israel in the time of the Babylonian captivity had been in their state so long that it was hard from them to believe that the God that had claimed them as their own had not abandoned them. Verse 27 speaks to that as it asks, "Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God'?" The people had gotten to the point that they figured God just couldn't be with them anymore. How could God be with them as God's chosen people when things had gone so wrong, the judgement upon them so harsh, so unforgiving, the punishment so horrific?

Many people throughout the ages have had times, even very faithful people, when they question whether or not God has forgotten about them. They still believe in God, they just don't think God cares about them anymore, for whatever reason. And yet the writer of Isaiah continues with what the Israelites knew at their core, it had been written on their hearts from the time of their birth,

²⁸Have you not known? Have you not heard? 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. ²⁹He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. ³⁰Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; ³¹but 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. (NRSV)

The questions, "Have you not know? Have you not heard?" are rhetorical questions. Of course the people knew of God's faithfulness. Of course God would not abandon them. It was just hard to tell in the moment. It can be that way for us as well. In our darkest times it is difficult to remember that God is still with us.

As I prepared for writing this message I read a commentary by Professor Stan Mast. It made me think about this passage differently than I had before and I would like to share some of his thinking that for him was also shaped by the sermon of another preacher, Dr. John Claypool. The thought is that there are three ways that God comes to us in times when we are weary and when we think about how God interacts with the world and us as individuals.

The first may be through direct intervention in the situation we find ourselves in. Remember that image of the eagle soaring? What one might also observe is an eagle after its prey. We don't say that people are "eagle eyed" for nothing. Eagles can spot a fish in the water from great heights and dive down and grasp the fish with its talons

before the fish has even realized that it is great peril. That analogy goes along well with how God can pluck us out of disaster or struggle in one fell swoop. However, we are not prey in God's hands, we are beloved children of God rescued from what it is that is overtaking us.

Quoting Professor Mast, "Sometimes God simply rescues us. Quickly, perhaps instantaneously, he gets us out of the situation or miraculously changes the situation. We soar up out of the situation on wings like eagles and the trouble is gone, behind us."¹

But we all know that God showing up in that kind of way does not always happen. It happens, but God showing up in other ways is more akin to our experience. Sometimes it takes a long time for things to sort themselves out. It is then then we may be encouraged by the lines of scripture that talk of having strength, of not growing weary. It is times like this that God comes along side us, and we and God work together to get through a situation. When we go through these times trusting that God has given us enough strength for the moment, the wisdom and courage to get through, that our strength is renewed. Though we may find ourselves weary, we can continue because we trust and know that God is with us.

Still there are other times when it just feels like God has left us in a situation to figure it out for ourselves. No amount of prayer seems to get through and no break throughs happen. Let me quote Stan Mast again, because his words aptly describe what I have known and witnessed but have not had words for.

...there are other times when God's help doesn't change the situation at all. He doesn't rescue us out of the situation and he doesn't give us the strength to repair it ourselves. Instead, he simply gives us the strength to endure, so that we are personally renewed. The situation doesn't change, but we do. We grow stronger. We don't faint. We think we will, but we don't. We just keep walking through the situation and we emerge on the other side of it a renewed person, because God gives us the strength to endure.²

We all prefer it when God just resolves our troubling circumstances, but often it is the deepest of struggles that have the power to change us in ways that we could not have imagined. It is not that God wills this for our lives. Still, God will use these circumstances to grow us if we allow it. The world is broken. People are broken and so our lives are affected by those circumstances and relationships. But God does not abandon us in our affliction. God is always present. Always with us in the struggle.

We know this because God, in Jesus, became flesh. Jesus experienced the pain of the body, mind, and spirit as a human being. God is not aloof, but is on the ground in the struggle, with you always, in the world always. We can count on that just as those who

¹ [Stan Mast. Isaiah 40:21-31 - Center for Excellence in Preaching](#). Accessed December 6, 2024.

² Ibid.

in Babylon knew that truth deep in their souls. God was with them, even if they could not feel it or understand how God was present. They knew it still because of the stories of the people who witnessed to God's presence throughout their history. Their history is ours and more so.

Jesus is God's new covenant that is the story of God with us since the beginning of time. The creating God of Genesis is still with us now creating, responding, and restoring. In that we can rejoice as we do each Christmas. The reminder that God is with us. Emmanuel.

Our struggles are real, they make us weary. In that, know that God is in it with you and because of that we can respond and be there for others as Galatians tells us to "not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up. ¹⁰So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith."

Today, whatever you face, remember that the God, who was and is and will be, is with you and in the world. Thanks be to God for being ever present. The God of hope, peace, joy, and love goes with us and is with us always.