

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

February 7, 2021 (5th Sunday after Epiphany, Year B)
Isaiah 40:21-31

These words that we read from Isaiah bring back a strong memory for me. In 2003, the space shuttle Columbia exploded on re-entry into the earth's atmosphere. It was a sad day for our nation. What struck me, and why I associate it with these verses, was that, when the president at the time, George W. Bush, addressed the nation about the disaster, he QUOTED this scripture in his message, and it's always stuck with me. This is what he said:

(show video or read below):

In the skies today we saw destruction and tragedy. Yet farther than we can see there is comfort and hope. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, "Lift your eyes and look to the heavens. Who created all these? He who brings out the starry hosts one by one and calls them each by name. Because of His great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing."

He continued:

The same Creator who names the stars also knows the names of the seven souls we mourn today. The crew of the shuttle Columbia did not return safely to Earth; yet we can pray that ALL are safely home.

Now, whatever you thought of the president back then, THAT was well said. And those words speak well to us as a nation TODAY as well, having lost over 460,000 souls to the pandemic. We need those kinds of words of comfort.

Political leaders don't often quote scripture, and politics being what it is, most of the time they SHOULDN'T quote scripture, but that was POWERFUL, and it was EXACTLY what the nation needed to hear that day, and THIS one...because when it comes to matters of life and death, GOD'S Word is what we LONG to hear. It speaks words of comfort. It speaks words of strength. It speaks RIGHT to our hearts. It SPEAKS to us, because it speaks GOD'S heart.

We sometimes question God, and we HEAR our questions on the lips of the prophet Isaiah: We say, "Don't you care God? Aren't you listening?" "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God."

But in Isaiah, God RESPONDS with questions of his own. In this passage, we're asked no less than NINE questions, posed by GOD Himself. "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? To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord' Have you not known? Have you not heard?"

Did you notice that TWO of those questions were REPEATED? Now, anyone who's ever been to one of my Bible studies can tell you what it MEANS when the Bible repeats itself. It means, "Pay attention! This is important!"

"Have you not known? Have you not heard?" *The Message* translation puts it THIS way: "Have you not been paying attention? Have you not been listening?"

Thankfully, God ANSWERS his questions FOR us. The creator of the universe, and all its wonders, is ALSO its KEEPER. He SUSTAINS it and HOLDS it in the palm of his hand.

Listen to Isaiah:

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.

Whenever I hear those words, they send a TINGLE up my spine. It's a POWERFUL word of PROMISE.

"Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength." Those of you who HAVE young children, or grandchildren, or TEACH, here, or at school, you know HOW powerful that promise is. How do you keep GOING when you've been up all night with a sick child? How do you overcome the exhaustion? How do you outlast those whirling dervishes?

The answer is simple – YOU don't. YOU can't. WAIT for the LORD. "Those who wait for the Lord shall RENEW their strength, they shall mount up with wings like EAGLES."

Dear friends, God is not only the SOURCE of our strength, the Lord IS our strength. God desires that all His children would be whole, in body and spirit. And in Christ's compassionate and healing presence through the Word, and through his MEAL, God gives us HIS strength.

When the NATION of Israel was defeated, lost and isolated, the prophet spoke: "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the one who sits above the circle of the earth and stretches out the heavens before them."

When Israel was weary with all that burdened it, when violence had torn the nation, when it seemed like they couldn't go on, the prophet spoke: "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD does not faint or grow weary."

God speaks to YOU too. So, when everyone and every-THING is searching for YOU, wanting a PIECE of you, and DEMANDING your time, the prophet speaks: "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord gives POWER to the faint, and STRENGTH to the powerless."

So, when you can't catch your breath between work, shopping, sports, housecleaning and clearing snow, preparing meals, and getting ready to do it ALL over again tomorrow, the prophet speaks: "Have you not known? Have you not heard? You shall run and NOT be weary, you shall walk and NOT faint."

So, when you grow weak from giving so much of yourself to others, when you cry out, "God, I can't DO this anymore," the prophet speaks: "Have you not known? Have you not heard? Those who wait for the Lord shall RENEW their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles."

Have you not understood who it IS that we WORSHIP? Have you not encountered the mighty deeds of God, whose hands CREATED, and STILL PRESERVE, us and the whole world? "LIFT up your eyes and look to the heavens. Who CREATED all these? He who brings out the starry hosts one by one and calls them EACH by NAME. Because of His great power and mighty strength, NOT ONE of them is missing."

THIS is the God who HOLDS us in his hands. God created us and KNOWS EACH of us by NAME. So, in the midst of YOUR need for healing, in the midst of your grief, in the midst of your weariness, in the midst of your exhaustion, in the midst of your frustration, WAIT for the Lord. RENEW your strength. And God will give you WINGS, to FLY like an eagle. Amen.