
Sermon
on Isaiah 40,21 – 31 | “Becoming the People of God”
”*With Wings Like Eagles*”

∴ ZERO ∴

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

*“Grace to you and PEACE from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

1 Co 1:3. (NRSV)

∴ Amen.

∴ ONE ∴

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

In the bible reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, we have heard comforting words.

These words of the Prophet Isaiah are a message to a people far from their homeland.

These are words for people who **NEED** such words, who **YEARN** for them.

They are words for the people of Israel living in exile in Babylon.

They long for something like a *resurrection from the ruins of their souls*—it must have felt that way in exile.

Seen from the outside, they probably lacked nothing, but their souls were frayed with sorrow—their faith was threatened to slip away.

Not surprising when it looks to them as if their God has abandoned them – as if he simply *allowed* them to be taken away.

Now they live among those who have triumphed, and – as it seems – whose God is the mightier.

They are on a quest for God - wondering if He will be found again.

∴ TWO ∴

It is not without reason that, precisely in the time of Exile, **CREATION** as part of God's history with *His people* **AND** *all other nations*—indeed the *whole world*—gained a **SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE**.

The prophet wants to assure the people of the greatness of their God:

*Lift up your eyes on high and see:
Who created these?
He 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.*

Isaiah 40:26

Isaiah draws a straight line:
You are the descendants of Jacob.
His God is your God.

And this God is also the Creator of heaven and earth.

This God is the Preserver of **ALL** peoples, the Founder of the world—and is also the one who helps you in the foreign land,—in the ruins of your soul.

*Have 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.*

Isaiah 40:28

::: THREE :::

How do you feel at the moment?
Does life feel like some exile to you?

I remember about four years ago life felt like living in a foreign land, in the unfamiliar—and thus sitting in my own home.

The time of the pandemic, lockdown...

Not lacking what was needed to survive, but the soul seemed to be slowly fraying in sadness—over not being able to do things with others.

Feeling like having to live in Exile is not only for captured people or people in a pandemic.

Feeling like living in exile can have so many reasons.

∴ **FOUR** ∴

We are captured in situations we cannot alter.
We sit, we have to wait...

In words of Lisa Hancockⁱ:

“But those who wait for the Lord...”

(Isaiah 40:31)

What exactly does this mean, do you think?

How can we wait for the Lord?

Or aren't we always waiting for the Lord?

It is our condition of life, really.

Everything we do involves waiting for the Lord.

We pray and then we wait.

We work and then we wait.

We get on with our lives, yet all the while, we are waiting to see what will happen – what the Lord will do.

We can't force God's action on anything.

We can't ensure that God will respond to our requests in any way that is visible to us.

So, waiting on the Lord is what it means to live in the world. [...] We're always waiting.

*[As we take a] look at these verses from Isaiah: Maybe we're in the wrong **MODE** of waiting.*

*Isaiah doesn't seem to be asking us to wait for God to **ACT**. Instead, there seems to be a call to recognize **WHO GOD IS**.*

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

Isaiah is asking us to go back to our fundamental understanding of the nature of God.

The presence of God. The reality of God.

He goes back to the beginning; he looks at the ground beneath our feet. God is a part of all of it. God is the source of all of it—the source of you.

::: FIVE :::

God is the source of you, of all your being.

And he is always here with you. To Moses he revealed his name as “I am who I am”.

Being is the nature of God, **AND** creative love is the nature of God.

God breathed his breath of life in everything, every being that is.

The Rev. Laurie Moeller writesⁱⁱ:

The words of Isaiah are timeless and necessary for all generations. Every generation grows weary and exhausted by the tragedy and suffering of the earth.

Every generation encounters events [...] that cause us to question God's power and presence and forget God's promise.

Wars, pandemics, poverty, natural disasters, suicide, racial injustice—in addition to personal individual grief and sorrow—plague every age.

We all need to respond to the invitation to look up at the sky and consider: Who created these?

We all must be reminded to remember who created it all and the magnificent power and love with which we were all breathed into being.

We all need to be prompted by the questions "Don't you know?" and "Haven't you heard?" because life can certainly cause us to forget.

∴ SIX ∴

[...] The real threat to our lives and our hope is not all the tragedy on the earth or the frailty of our bodies.

The real threat is our lack of memory of the everlasting God whose understanding is beyond human reach, giving power to the tired and reviving the exhausted.

[...] During the suffering and the trauma that will continue to challenge us we must keep telling [each other] about [...] the continued promises of God.

We must continue to share the stories of God raising God's people up on eagle's wings, bearing them on the breath of dawn, making them shine like the sun.

In Babylonian Exile as in modern-day darkness, the people of God will always have a story of God's strength.

We will always have memories of overcoming.

::: SEVEN :::

This is what we can and need to do: remind each other of when God gave us new strength, a new hope when we were hopeless.

This is what we have to share in testimonies, this is what we have to share care- and mind-fully with those who are caught in weak- or darkness.

It may take time, and the path our journey with God leads us, may not be what we expected or wished for.

But this remains true:

*[Those] who wait for the Lord
shall renew their strength,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.*

[They] shall mount up with wings like eagles...

::: Amen.

ⁱ Lisa Hancock, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/becoming-the-people-of-god/fifth-sunday-after-the-epiphany-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/fifth-sunday-after-the-epiphany-year-b-preaching-notes>, 2024-02-03.

ⁱⁱ Laurie Moeller, <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/11606/february-4-2024>, 2024-02-03.