

MESSAGE: “Strength Renewed”

Text: Isaiah 40:21-31

Liturgist Text: Mark 1:29-39

MEDITATION

We speak of *Sabbath* as a day of rest – rest from labor, rest from striving, rest from believing it depends upon us. It is a day for ‘surrendering our lives to God and God’s direction.’ If we find ourselves growing tired and exhausted, it may be because we ‘push through,’ not really believing God sees, cares and acts. We convince ourselves that “God only helps those who help themselves.” *Sabbath* is forgotten, or distorted into ‘recreation-busy’ instead of ‘work-busy.’ How is strength renewed? By returning to Source, “Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength; they will fly on wings like eagles...” (Isaiah 40:30)

Purpose: the purpose of this message is to remind us that strength is renewed by trusting God, our Higher Power.

Sooner or later, and generally sooner, we come to a point of physical, emotional and spiritual fatigue. We grow tired of persevering in the face of challenge. We may feel ‘taken for granted,’ and look for an ‘escape-hatch’ to responsibility. We may feel like God takes no notice of us, like God has bigger fish to fry than the troubles we face. We may throw our hands up in frustration, shouting to no one in particular, “God doesn’t see! God doesn’t care! God doesn’t act!” We need renewal, but are not certain how to find it.

A number of years ago, I heard a story about Tad and Abraham Lincoln which may be illustrative. President Lincoln grew closer to Tad following the death of his younger brother Willie while they lived in the white House. One day, Tad urgently wanted to speak to his father who was engaged with members of his cabinet. The gatekeeper of the President’s schedule thought he would have some fun with Tad, “You mean, you want to see the chief executive officer of the great Republic of which we are members?”

“No,” Tad answered, “I want to see my father.”

“I see,” replied the gatekeeper, “you want to converse with the Commander-in-chief of the United States Armed Forces during time of war?”

“No,” replied Tad, increasingly frustrated, “I need to speak with my Dad.”

“O, I see,” continued the unyielding gatekeeper, “you want to speak to the President of these United States, Emancipator and Preserver of the Union.”

“No, I don’t.” Tad insisted, exasperated, “I want to see my father!” With that, he dodged the gatekeeper, burst through the door, and ran to his father who placed him on his knee and asked what it was he needed.

The Israelites who received the prophetic admonition in Isaiah 40 were in a similar position to Tad. They needed access to God, for help, counsel and deliverance, yet, they too, were prevented—not by a gatekeeper per se, but by their own inability to ‘wait upon God.’ They grew restless in lament, “My way is hidden from God! God doesn’t care about my predicament.” Of course, once mortal humanity takes on the tasks of eternal divinity, fatigue, discouragement and despair are the predictable result.

Perhaps you were raised on the adage, “The Lord helps those who help themselves.” You won’t find that statement in the Bible, because it doesn’t come from the Bible. It is common wisdom which carries a measure of truth in the sense that we are partners with God in kingdom work, but if we try to do it all ourselves, we will fall exhausted—guaranteed. The actual words of scripture are more like these: “For your God is the one who helps you...” (II Chronicles 12:18), “The Lord God helps them and rescues them...” (Psalm 37:40) or “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness...” (Romans 8:26).

One of the precious gifts which we may discover in an intentional Lenten journey is the gift of clarity—clarity about who God is and who we are. “Don’t you know?” Isaiah asks, “Haven’t you heard?” God is the Source and Supervisor of all things! God doesn’t take naps on the job. God sees all things simultaneously through the macroscope and the microscope. God knows about both the nuclear capabilities of belligerent countries and how worried you are over test results you will receive on Thursday. God knows, God sees, God cares, and God acts—for good for those who love God and are called according to God’s purpose.

Allow me to read the latter part of our text one more time, this time from a contemporary paraphrase of Isaiah’s prophecy by Eugene Peterson. (Read Isaiah 40:25-31).

‘Wait upon God,’ ‘Trust in God,’ ‘Hope in the Lord.’ Whatever the translation or paraphrase, the antidote to spiritual fatigue is the same: center your heart upon God. You have an addiction wrecking your life over which you have no control? Surrender to your Higher Power, and you will find deliverance. You have a fear that keeps you from sleeping at night? Place it before God in prayer, and you will rest with a peace that passes understanding. You grow weary from juggling 15 balls of ‘have to’ responsibilities? Ask God if you *should* be juggling all of those things and release the ones you *shouldn’t*. The three or four you end up with will be such a delight to your soul that they won’t feel like ‘have-to’s’ at all!

Let communion be your *Sabbath*. As you come to receive the elements, hand your worries, your troubles, your sins to God. Don’t reach for the bread and cup until you have let them go. Then nourish yourselves with the elements of God’s table. Place your hope in

Christ, the well of *Living Water*. Those who hope in God get fresh strength. They spread their wings and soar like eagles, they run without getting tired, they walk without becoming weary.