

Old Testament Reading Isaiah 40:21-31

21 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? **22** It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; **23** who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. **24** Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. **25** To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One. **26** 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. **27** 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"? **28** 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. **29** He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. **30** Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; **31** 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.

New Testament Reading Mark 1:29-39

29 *As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.* **30** *Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once.* **31** *He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.* **32** *That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.* **33** *And the whole city was gathered around the door.* **34** *And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.* **35** *In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.* **36** *And Simon and his companions hunted for him.* **37** *When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you."* **38** *He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do."* **39** *And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.*

Years ago, Tim and I decided to host an open house at the parsonage we were living in at the time. The parsonage belonged to his church, but we invited my church to attend as well. I worked all day the day before getting food prepared and getting the house prepared and then it hit me...the stomach bug. The next evening, I lay in bed upstairs listening to the party happening downstairs...the party I had prepared and looked forward to. It was happening without me. I enjoyed hearing their laughter and bits of their storytelling but I was itching to go down and take care of them. I worried Tim wouldn't notice if bowls needed refilling or food reheated. I worried that no one would know where the extra napkins were or that there were extra drinks in the garage.

So, I should have more sympathy for the story in Mark's gospel, but I find that every time I read it, I get a little irritated. This poor woman is lying in bed sick; we presume something worse than my little stomach bug, and her son in law decided to bring company for dinner. Then again, if one member of that company is a faith-healing Messiah...well...good job Simon. So, upon hearing she is sick, Jesus goes in, takes her hand, and pulls her up out of bed. I can't help but notice the fever doesn't leave until she is up, on her feet. I wonder what she was thinking before that, as he was pulling her from beneath her warm blankets. And here she is, newly healthy, scrambling to the kitchen to make dinner for the house full of people who are sitting around staring at her in amazement. I'm just saying they could have at least let her take a nap first. Then I remember how I lay in my sick-bed and yearned to be up serving my guests and I remember what joy it brings me to do that...to serve people in ways that comfort and stir happiness. I'm happy for her. I stop being irritated because I don't think she was irritated; I think she was radiant. I think she was thrilled to go from the worry that she might be dying to the joy of feeling strength in her body and love in her heart. That's what happens when we serve, at least it's what should happen. I also can't help but notice she is serving alongside Jesus now. They serve together, as he continues to heal and she continues to welcome to the table those who are weary and seeking help. He is touching hands, she is waiting tables, they are changing lives.

Mark irritates us again when Jesus sneaks out of the house, even as other households are crawling from beds, lighting lamps in the early morning hours and preparing their sick for the journey over to Simon and Andrew's house to be healed. Jesus leaves. He goes to re-fuel, to connect with God, to pray, to rest...but when they find him and tell him a new que is forming at the house and people are looking for him...he doesn't go...at least that is what Mark leads us to believe. That Jesus leaves for another town. He isn't trying to be cruel; he simply is trying to get back to his purpose, trying to get back on message, he has a story to tell and good news to share, and while healing people is a gift he has, physical healing is not the point for which he has been born...he moves forward.

Jesus, a rabbi proclaiming messages in synagogues, would have known Isaiah's text well. He would have known the human body as the fragile grasshopper, the shallow rooted plant blown from its soil and tossed to the winds. He would know the fragility of life and that even as he healed, the body would again wither and die. Jesus needed to push the disciples on to something else...a new realization...that this life, these moments to which we cling so tightly are not the only moments in which God is with us or makes promises to us. Jesus needed us to understand that healing and wholeness don't just happen because Jesus comes and takes us by the hand...they also happen when we get up and serve.

After Isaiah reminds us that God, as creator, holds all the power and provides the foundation for life, he shares the good news that God doesn't hoard that power all to God's self. God, who does not faint or grow weary, gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. Even those known for having strength and endurance, the young ones among us, will see how little

they have apart from God...but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength...they shall run and not be weary, walk and not faint...like the eagle who soars on unseen currents of air, the unseen power of God will lift them up higher than they can imagine....those who wait for the Lord...

Which is an interesting phrase. What does it mean to wait for the Lord? Does it mean we are to be content to just sit back and trust that God will act and do nothing on our own. Is waiting passive? I don't think so. In verse 24 Isaiah is saying the princes and rulers are uprooted and blown to the wind without much effort on God's part...just blown...randomly dispersed by a power greater than their own. But those who wait for the Lord also take to the air...not randomly uprooted and tossed about...but on wings like Eagles. Eagles fly with purpose and intentionality. An Eagle soars partly because of the powerful air currents that hold it up and partly because of its own ability to spread its wings, flap its wings, use its wings in partnership with the air.

This isn't the first time that scripture mentions the wings of Eagles. You might remember the story in Exodus where Moses has obeyed God and led the Hebrew people out of Egypt to the banks of the Red Sea where they were trapped between the water and the approaching army of Pharaoh, intent on slaughtering them. Moses told the people, just be still and cry out to God, God will save us...but God said to Moses, why are you calling out to me, tell them to move forward. God then tells Moses what to do in order to part the waters and allow the people to pass safely to the other side. Later God says to Moses: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. God delivered a soaring victory for God's people, but they had to act as well. They had to partner with God in their deliverance...they had to move forward. Waiting for the Lord is not passive.

Isaiah was speaking to bring hope to a nation that had lost everything that they had fought for in their Exodus. They were waiting for God to deliver them again...they looked to the sky for the Eagle's to swoop down and save them but thus far, they have seen nothing but suffering. Some of us have been there, waiting for tough times to end and for God to step in and make things better again. I can't help but wonder if Isaiah mentions the Eagles so that they will think of the Exodus story...of how in their ancestor's worst moments, God was there. In their darkest days, God led them with light. In their weakest and most vulnerable moments, God was there saying, "move forward, I've got this."

Sometimes, while we are still feverish and weak, Jesus takes us by the hand and says, "move forward, I've got this. Stand up, I'm here. You won't faint, you won't be weary, wait on me...you will see. I know Isaiah didn't mean it this way, but it is a fun play on words...wait for the Lord. Isaiah means to trust in the Lord, but Simon's mother-in-law shows us that waiting on the Lord can also be about what we do while we wait. She literally waits on him, serves him, prepares the table, breaks the bread, and pours the wine. She rises up and renews her strength by living into her purpose and her calling to serve Jesus...even as the last bit of illness leaves her body.

And even as we find ourselves a bit uncomfortable that Jesus leaves the next morning while people are coming to find him and be healed, I can't help but imagine that it is Simon's mother-in-law greeting each one at the door and serving them in love and compassion...that as they came they found a community of neighbors who waited with them and renewed their faith that God indeed was among them. I can't help but imagine, they encountered the church...a community becoming the people of God, with a purpose to strengthen the weak and comfort the weary.

We may be waiting for Jesus to return, but we are called to serve while we wait.