

"WHEN WEARINESS TAKES HOLD"

A Sermon By

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INTRODUCTION

If the Gospel consists of both challenge and comfort - as it does - of both demand and of promise, this then would be the time to speak of promise. These are the days for "speaking comfortably to Jerusalem". Spirits are down. Mid-winter blues are in the air. Perhaps you have them. Many are feeling pain and despair. Burdens and problems are weighing heavily on many hearts.

But bracket off, if you will, your anguish long enough to listen to these lifting words from Isaiah, words that "come up" 'round the heart" and make their appeal to us.

"Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they 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."

DEVELOPMENT

We have a forgiveable way of assuming that no one ever had it quite so rough as we have had it. But then...after a good night's sleep and a shower and good breakfast, we know that this is not the case.

The Second Isaiah, for example, was called to minister to a people who had lost just about everything. You'll perhaps recall that he was a prophet to the Jews in Babylonian Exile. Mind you, for generations they had been there. Their homes destroyed, their Temple demolished, their priesthood not functioning...some of them, doubtless, had sounded taps.

"God is gone.
Gone the Church,
Gone the Word,
Gone the King.
All is lost. Nothing saved. God is gone!"

Matters were so bad that even the young people had lost their resilience, their initiative, their sense of adventure. Societies have a way of looking to their young in hope of a better tomorrow. Vitality and change are usually to be found with the young. But in Second Isaiah's time, things were so down and so depressing that the young fell utterly exhausted. That's how bad it was.

But this grim description does not stand alone. It is followed by a promise. And here it is, "They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength".

To put it very simply, Isaiah is saying: we would not become so weary and discouraged if we only learned to wait on God. And yet the last thing we feel inclined to do when life roughs us up is to "wait". Almost to the point of frenzied panic, we want to act. "Do something" we shout. "For God's sake, do something." We shout it to each other - to the president, to the governor, to the mayor...yes to the Church. Do something. We shout it to our wives, or to our husbands, to our parents or our children. Do something. Who needs "waiting". It's ~~time~~ time for action. Who needs "waiting"...that's for the weak, or for those who like things the way they are, for the saints, perhaps, or for the mystics who have long since cut out from life.

WAITING FOR THE LORD

Now in the Bible, "waiting" is not a passive "do nothing" experience. I looked up the word in the dictionary the other day and noted that "waiting" is described as an intransitive verb. Most of us haven't studied grammar for some time, so let me remind us all of what an intransitive verb is. It's a verb that indicates a complete action without being accompanied by a direct object. For example: "sit" or "lie".

However correct it may be grammatically to classify "waiting" an intransitive verb, in the experience of faith "waiting" always involves another. There is an object there. Another subject, if you will, with whom the soul is actively engaged. The interaction of the living God with the soul of man is what Biblical waiting is all about. We need our faith lifted above the thoughts of our own minds and the work of our own hands. We keep meeting ourselves coming back as we try mentally with our own resources to figure it all out. "Waiting for the Lord" means to open ourselves to dialogue, to judgement, to communion with another.

Moreover, in the Bible, waiting is not the opposite of doing. It becomes the motivation for action! It does not disengage us from what is taking place in the world. It thrusts us into history - which is the story that God is still writing out. Waiting looks to the future that it then helps to bring forth. It aims to discern the Eternal here in the present. Time for an illustration.

One of baseball's most celebrated umpires is the late Bill Klem. Klem was known for his self-confidence, for his ability to look an angry manager straight in the eye and back into the dugout. When Klem was behind the plate he was in charge of everything that mattered. Among the many legends that gathered around his name is one involving a close call at home plate in the 9th inning of a critical game. The ball was hit, a base runner broke for home, the catcher crouched to catch the ball and to make the tag. At the moment of impact, there was a fierce collision. A cloud of dust went up and everyone waited for the umpire's decision. Voices in the visitor's dugout cried, "He's safe". Voices came from the other dugout that cried out, "He's out". Bill Klem stood there in the settling dust, very much in command and shouted for all to hear, "He ain't nothin' 'till I call it."

Now the point of this illustration is to lead us to this question: what construction do we put on everyday events? Is it purely a political construction, or an economic construction? How do we call it? How do we see it? Do we see it in terms of the State Department? Or the White House? Or the profit involved at the bottom line? Is there another way? We all bring our meanings to events, no matter what the event may be or touch in life. Nothing is anything until the dust around home plate settles and we make our call of it.

And this, in a way, is what "waiting" is all about. It enables us to make a reading from a better point of vision, hopefully from higher ground. Any event can be an "advent" to the person of faith. The problems and concerns that trouble us may indicate the workings of "another" in our midst. So much of the unrest and turmoil taking place in our lives and in the world at large doesn't necessarily mean the disappearance of God. Quite the opposite. Personally I'd wonder more about God's presence in our human affairs were we allowed tranquility and ease after some of the things we've done and the things we've gone along with.

But back to Isaiah and his lifting word to us, "They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength."

LOOK AT THE RESULTS

Let's look now at the results, if you will, of this waiting as the Prophet describes them. Here he uses three graphic words to arrest our confidence, to awaken our desires, to enfuse us with hope.

"MOUNT up with wings as eagles. RUN and not be weary. WALK and not faint."

That's the promise. There's a sequence here that rings true to life. In the case of those to whom Isaiah was speaking, the Hebrews "mounted up" when they heard that Cyrus had overthrown Babylon. Then they "ran" toward their Promised Land. Then they "walked"...that is, they settled down to that long, dreary business of restoring what had been destroyed while they had been in Exile.

This sequence happens in life today. There is in all human endeavor that moment when the vision strikes, when the affirmation is clearly felt, when that inner voice speaks with certainty, then the time when those giant steps, those starting steps are taken, to be followed in turn by long seasons of just "digging in", staying with it...persevering.

MOUNTING UP

"Mount up with wings as eagles". In the Scriptures, eagles are used both affirmatively and negatively. In some places, they're a "no-no", but here there is a positive and tender use of the eagle image. It's plain to see what's intended. If we "wait" on the Lord, we'll be able to soar, to rise up above the normal vantage point and see things more nearly as they are and as they ought to be. Perhaps that's part of the reason for the eagle that supports this pulpit, this place where the preacher puts his notes.

"Ground level" camera may be a plus in the world of TV, but ground level vision is and can be a handicap in fully understanding life.

And so this question presses itself on us: have you done any soaring lately? Have you been able to get above it? Above the job, above the family, above the many things that hassle us and cause us anxiety...to see things more clearly, as the eagle. If we did, we'd know for one thing that only God is truly necessary. If we did, we'd have more poise, more power, more peace and perseverance. "Waiting" helps us to soar...to get above the pressures and the problems that hassle us from one pay day to the next, that bring us down to ground level...sometimes even below ground level.

RUNNING

After the "mounting up" comes the running. Not from fright. It is rather the running to get with it and to stick with it. We run and we walk because the vision provides us with the "start up" power and the "staying" power. "They shall run and not be weary".

WALKING

And finally, "we walk and do not faint". The longer I live, the more I appreciate constancy - you know, that ability to stay with it, to see something through. Some "hot shot" comes on the scene and the people get excited - and then he's gone. Some young - nor not so young - "whirlwind" rises up and speaks his piece. In so doing he exhausts his mind and then is hard to find. But the folks I feel I can genuinely salute, whether it's religion, or government, or education or what you have - are the ones who know how to walk and not faint. They're the ones who get the work done, who make the difference, who

keep the vision alive.

Some time back there was a little exchange between the Washington Post and the New York Times. A top executive in each paper had a friendly "go" at each other's establishment. The man from the Times said, "The Post has a good fast ball, but its control is bad." And with tongue in cheek, the man from the Post replied, "The Times has good cruising speed." Meaning, of course, that the Times is consistently good, even though lacking a certain flare, flamboyancy or derring-do.

Good crusing speed. I like that and I respect it. We may get excited about that rare comet that streaks across the sky, or the falling star, but we still get our light and heat from the steady and unspectacular radiance of the sun and moon. As someone has said, thank God for routine, for "routine is what saves us between our times of inspiration". It ~~is~~ affirming Isaiah's ancient wisdom about "walking".

CONCLUSION A sense of weariness is in this February air. You may have picked up a case of mid-winter blues. You're entitled. For life is not easy; it's no disgrace to be "down" these days, but there's no reason why you and I who are part of this warm center of hope have to stay there.

The "Take-home" message today is simply this: soul power is a renewable source. God has much to give to us, but often our hands are too full to receive it. Our lives are too full, too pre-occupied to take it all in. "Waiting" means making room for God. Ships at sea look to the stars to know exactly where they are. "Wait for the Lord". As you sit quietly here this morning, think on these things:

Power belongs to God.
The cross is still His way.
The Kingdom is both here and coming.
His love constantly surrounds us.
The night will not be long.

Or, as the Psalmist chose to put it in that memorable line:

"Wait on the Lord. Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord."

PRAYER: Forgive us, Lord, for our "tunnel vision" that cannot see the stars, the exaltation of the immediate that so often blinds us to thy truth. Give us the poise and the abandon which belong to all who live in Thee, who love Thee and who look for Thy presence in the life around us.

Give us the ability to smile even on the worst of days; the stamina to persevere when the prize eludes our grasp; the courage to resume life alone when parted from a friend or loved one of many years; the faith to go on believing even when the clouds hang low. All to Thine eternal praise. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen