

Isaiah 40:21-31 - “Eagerly Waiting for the LORD”

Pr. Kurt A. Van Fossan - Epiphany 5B - 2021

Have you fallen prey to worrying about the future as a result of an illness or as these pandemic days drag on? Or perhaps you've fallen prey to worrying about your future as a result of the misguided policies of political leaders, or as a result of the sinful behavior of those closest to you or your own sins. If so, then you can begin to relate to what God's people were feeling during a time spoken of by the prophet Isaiah. I'm referring to the time when the temple and city of Jerusalem lay in ruins and most of God's people were being held captive in Babylon (modern day Iraq) by a powerful/evil ruler (Nebuchadnezzar). This captivity would last not just for months but for years on end. And yet, even during such hard times God, through Isaiah, asks His people, “Why are you worried?” *“Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?”*

Through these questions God compels His people then and now (especially during difficult times) to remember what we have learned about Him from His Word. Then He proceeds to remind us of His almighty power in creating this vast universe simply through His spoken word. Even though, according to some of the latest information from the Hubble Space Telescope, there are hundreds of billions more galaxies than the Milky Way galaxy which we can see with our eyes, yet God spread all of them out easier than you or me can pitch a tent. He also knows each of the zillions of stars by name, *“and because He is strong in power not one is missing.”* To whom can you compare to God? Who or what is even remotely close to being as powerful as God? No one, nothing!

Therefore, when it comes to the most difficult of times, or the powers of the most evil of rulers, remember that they are no match for God. He who created all things through His Word can just as easily put an end to them. As in the past, from Nebuchadnezzar, to Hitler, to Satan, God can and will, when the time is right, *“make the rulers of the earth as emptiness.”* He will bring them to nothing as easily as He uprooted a huge tree in Greeley this past week through a gust of wind. *“The tempest carries them off like stubble.”*

Why does God let evil appear to rule in the first place? When it came to the evil rule of the Babylonians, God would be at work helping His people see where they were headed as a result of their sinful, unrepentant worship of false gods. At other times, like the time of drought during the days of Joseph, which resulted in God's people leaving their homeland and moving to Egypt for food, God was at work revealing His love and power of salvation not only to His known people from Israel, but also to His unknown people in Egypt—those who would also believe in Him and be saved.

So, whatever the evil or trouble we experience or see happening in this world, we can rest assured that God has not lost control. Instead He is always working in ways He knows best, to enable His people to repent or continue to repent of their sins and trust in His love and forgiveness—to ultimately save us from eternal suffering and death. For God *“desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (1 Timothy 2:4).

Nowhere is this more clear—this power of God to work for our good event through the most evil of people and things in this world, than when God the Father allowed His Son to be crucified on a cross for our sins—to set us free from our sins, death and all evil, and through His resurrection from the dead on the third day to give us new and eternal life in Him.

And lest we think that we don't need God to continue to remind us of the way He works to save us and others, or to keep us repenting of our sins and following His way of love and forgiveness, the LORD also reminds us that "*even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted.*"

Apart from God and the strength He alone is able to give us, we will all grow weary of doing even what we as Christians know and believe is right—of acting in unselfish, loving ways even to those we love the most and who love us the most, such as our spouse or parents. But what happens when we "*wait for the LORD?*"

To "*wait for the LORD*" does not mean to sit and twiddle our thumbs. Instead, to "*wait for the LORD*" is to live as God's people in the confidence that God can and does work through all things for the good of His Church—for our eternal salvation.

How is such a life of confident waiting for the LORD possible? Not apart from God, but connected to God and His present actions on our behalf—His present work of salvation through His Word and Sacraments, where He feeds and strengthens our faith in His ability to work even through evil rulers, sickness, and times of suffering—the cross—for our good. The more He renews and strengthens our faith in Him, the more He enables us to "*mount up with wings like eagles*"—to fly over our problems instead of being grounded by them, and thus to lead others to the same source of flight, God's Word and Sacraments, for their salvation.

All glory be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

[Children's Sermon] One of the things I was saying to you and your parents earlier in this sermon is that when we try to save ourselves from all the things in this world that threaten to hurt us, we will all wear out.

Let me give you an example. Let's pretend that you saw this jar of honey laying on the ground and you decided to pick it up to see if there was any honey inside. Then all of a sudden a big grizzly bear comes out of nowhere and starts running toward you because that's his honey and he thinks you're stealing it. What would you do? [run]

If you tired to run from a real grizzly bear, who is going to be able to run faster and longer, you or the grizzly bear? The grizzly bear.

A forest ranger in Yellowstone National Park once told me what she did when a big grizzly bear was running toward her. She knew that she would not be able to save herself by running, so she curled up on the ground like a helpless baby. As a believer in Jesus Christ, what else would you do? [Pray to God for help].

How will God help you? He might use the bear to end your life in this world, so that can then be with God in heaven. Or God may stop the bear from killing you, like He did for the forest ranger, so that she and you can tell other people about God's power to save us not only from grizzly bears but even from death by telling them about Jesus' death and resurrection so that they can also live forever with God.