

**Epiphany 5 (B)**  
Pastor Ed Harkey

Isaiah 40: (21-26) 27-31  
TLC, Keene, NH

*"Fly ... Run ... Walk"*

*"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."*

*"If you can't fly, then run; if you can't run, then walk; if you can't walk, then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward." (Martin Luther King)*

### **Introduction**

*Questions.* "Interrogative expressions, often used to test knowledge ... a sentence worded or expressed so as to elicit information." (Merriam-Webster; Dictionary.com)

*Questions.* Intended to provoke a thought – a response ... not quickly dismissed. Where, in the vv. leading up to our text this morning, God's got a bale of them.

*<sup>12</sup> Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span ...? <sup>13</sup> Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel? <sup>14</sup> Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding? ... <sup>21</sup> Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? ... <sup>26</sup> Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these?*

The nation of Israel is on trial; the prophet Isaiah the "prosecuting attorney" ... representing the Lord of heaven and earth, who stands as the aggrieved party. Why the grilling? Because Israel has broken faith. They've lost their memory of God. Now, also having lost hope in Him – they've set about to put their trust in something else. Chasing the wind, or anything else that might bring relief.

You know, I do that sometimes, especially when the chips are down. When things aren't going my way. When I can't see clearly, and I put my faith and trust in my own reason or understanding. When I may know *what* God wants, but not wanting to do it His way. Such is life – at times – in "Eddie's world." ☺

How about you? Do you ever feel like you're chasing a whirlwind – or worse, are caught up in it? When the answers you seek aren't coming quick enough? When – perhaps in the midst of a season of discontent, you're wondering how you might make it, when your hells and your heavens seem but inches apart! (Mullins)

It's then, when questions are most prone to come. Our own, and our Lord's – of us. Intended not to be callous, but again, to provoke a response ... for us to go deep into ourselves, and deeper still into the grace and goodness of God.

***<sup>27</sup> Why do you say, O Jacob (or insert name here), and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"?***

How often this question (or its many relatives) rattles around in our hearts and minds – perhaps even making its way to our lips, or our actions. Where, what does it look like when we do this, when we think God has left us to ourselves? Or does not see?

Well, if asked out of a posture of defiance, the answer may take the form of shaking our fists at the heavens as if we know better. The answer may be found in wanting to justify our bad behavior, or in turning to *anything* that will bring us relief – even if that very thing we turn to might be killing us.

When asked out of that sort of posture, the Lord is going to do what He always does through His Word: as with Israel, He takes us to task. *"Let me hear joy and gladness,"* King David once pleaded while in the depths, *"let the bones that you have broken rejoice."* (Psalm 51:8). Where, indeed, there will be grace and forgiveness. There always is ... but *only* for those who realize their plight, and return to the Lord in repentance and faith. Only for those who "fly, run, walk" or even crawl to the well of Living Water, to receive what we seek – pardon/relief! (John 4:10)

But then, sometimes the questions of God's whereabouts and His love flow not so much from a posture of rebellion as from one of great need – from distress, grief, agony or shame. Where is God then? And what is His stance towards us?

Isaiah brings us to the answer – of course, in the form of another question:

***<sup>28 a</sup> Have you not known? Have you not heard?***

Known what? Heard what?

[Certainly, that God will not be trifled with. That there is sure to be a judgment that awaits those who live their lives in defiance of God's Word, where repentance stands ready at the doorstep of each and every one of us.]

That when questions of where and why are asked out of distress, the Lord – again – does what He always does. He comes in grace. He applies the healing balm of forgiveness to our wounds. He points us beyond ourselves, to a place – to His crucified and risen Son – declaring once and for all “pardon, peace, relief.”

Child of God your heavenly Father has not forgotten your address. He will not abandon us either to the hells we at times create for ourselves, or which press in on us from without? Why? Just look to His assurances – three of them to be exact. Three Gospel Words for a soul on fire, in need of God’s great grace:

***<sup>28b</sup> The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary ...”***

Ever-present, ever knowing, ever powerful – that is the God who saves us:

“*Everlasting ... Creator*” ... who doesn’t just set all of this into motion and then, take a holiday. Who not only created you, but who in *everlasting* love gave the best of what He had – His own Son – to redeem you.

He who is as ever-present as Peter’s mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31), or any and all who came to Him in the throes of their distress (1:32-34). Not a one was turned away. Not a one was denied the mercy and grace they sought. Not a one! Neither shall you be, child of God, neither shall you!

For our God is **omnipresent** ... coming to a town near you. To your city! This city!

Omni (ever) present ... and **omniscient**, all knowing ... with an “***understanding (that) is unsearchable.***” Who sees things we don’t. Who may withhold from our prayers that which He sees as hurtful and harmful, but who showers His grace upon us with abundant measure.

Omni (ever) present, omniscient (all-knowing) ... and finally, **omnipotent**:

***<sup>29</sup> He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might He increases strength.***

Who demonstrated that power not only our heavenly Father created the world with but a Word, but then, through that Word made flesh in Jesus, takes the mess and the muck of our lives upon His shoulders, putting to rest – once and for all ...

Any doubt as to the question of His love for us! Yes, does God truly love you?  
Asked and answered. No further questions needed.

Thus, bringing us, by His grace, to ...

✚ Stop the striving.

**<sup>30</sup> *Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted ...***

To be sure, we know all about this. Perhaps, even this morning, you find yourself “strived” out. Where, we’ve come to the end of ourselves, and are ready to fall into the outstretched arms of the Savior who waits. Good news! He does!

*“Come to me (Jesus invites), all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ... for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*  
(Matthew 11:28-29)

Just as He has been, He will always be *for you* ... always! Stop the striving.

✚ Wait on Him.

Where, a big part of the waiting is the abiding ... *“abide in me as I in you”* (John 15:1-11) ... the availing yourself of His grace – His given means. Trust His Word. Greet Him who greets you in the forgiveness He freely grants to you. Meet Him daily in your Baptism ... and at [t]His Table of grace.

There are only one of two places that your heartache, your grief, your distress, or your guilt can reside – either on you, or on Christ. If it remains on us, we will be crushed. But, if it is put on Christ, laid on that hill outside of Jerusalem, covered by love “flowing freely mingled down” ... then, we have a fighting chance. Then, we do more than survive. We thrive. For He has borne the worst of it. It can no longer bring harm, for He has taken it on Himself. Willingly! Freely! Totally!

So that ...

**<sup>31</sup> *They who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall ...***

Be renewed in His grace and forgiveness, they *shall* ...

***Mount up with wings like eagles; (they) shall run and not be weary; (they) shall walk and not faint.***

✚ “Fly ... run ... walk.”

Us ... renewed in *His* strength – “over time, through Bible study, worship, (spiritual) practices of faith like hospitality and forgiveness, stewardship and service, we come to a place of knowing God’s ways, even if we cannot sufficiently put words to it.” (Jones, *Feasting on the Word (B)*, 1:318)

Where, once renewed, we come to renew others. Now free, we become servants, doing “*all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.*” (1 Corinthians 9:19, 23) Blessed, we now become a blessing.

### **Conclusion**

Towards the end of book of Proverbs, the writer makes this observation:

*“Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand: (the first of which is) the way of an eagle in the sky ...”* (Proverbs 30:18-19)

“Amazing, isn’t it? We are no longer vultures or peacocks or chickens or crows.” (Lessing, *CPR*, 19:1, 34) No, says the apostle Paul:

*“If anyone is in Christ, he (she) is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

And with the new, comes a renewed hope ... hope, along with a lifetime of questions asked, and answered ... whose answers are where they’ve always been. In Christ alone ... enabling the children of God this day to ... “*run ... fly ... walk.*”

*Amen.*

*Friday E-mail:*

So, if you could ask the Lord one question, and know that you would get a direct on-the-spot answer, what would it be?

In his book *The Gospel Today: a Theology of Evangelism*, Robert Kolb takes the position that the answers we seek to the questions we ask often depend on the reason we are asking them. E.g. if someone asked you “So, what’s your take on all of the upheaval going on in the world today?” a good comeback might be “Why do you want to know?” Where, your answer is going to be a lot different if they are asking the question out of rage, delight or defiance, or out of a sense of impotence, emptiness or terror. All to say, questions matter. But so do the answers we give, especially when folks are at the proverbial end of their rope.

In **Isaiah 40:21-31** (my text for Sunday), it’s God who’s asking the questions. In fact, if you want to get a fuller picture, read the entire chapter. Wherein, our Creator and Savior is full of them. Read them. Ponder them. For when God asks questions of His people, He’s doing more than biding time. His questions, rather, are intended for us to pause and ponder, to go deep into ourselves and discern the answer. Why is the Lord asking? What does He want me to know? What is He beckoning me to believe? What sin does He want me to confess? What hope does He want me to embrace? What step of faith does He want me to take?

Where, to be sure, life is full of questions. You may even have a few yourself. But rejoice today that as the Lord poses the questions He does, His intent is to move you forward in the blessed truth that He is ever-present with you in *whatever* you are going through. That His being all knowing is not intended to condemn you, but to assure you that *“not a single sparrow falls to the ground w/o His knowledge.”* That His being all powerful assures us that whatever the questions of life – most of which are probably asked out of some grief or pain – they will always find their fulfillment in a Savior who upholds us and this planet with His outstretched arms. Arms that bore – and *still* bear – the deepest longings of our lives. In this scenario, *“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.”*

*“Fly ... run ... walk”* ... ever moving forward in the Lord’s grace and the strength, sometimes with questions ... whose answers are found where they’ve always been found. In Christ alone. In Christ alone. SYOS