

Isaiah 40:21-31

Epiphany 5B Midweek + February 7, 2018
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church • Boise, Idaho
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What You Know

The Word of the Lord from Isaiah 40:31: "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." This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

"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?"

The Lord hurls the challenge at the people of Israel, captives in Babylon. They've lost their home and homeland. They've seen friends and family slain. They've been forcibly relocated from Jerusalem to faraway captivity. All they knew is taken from them, and they are truly strangers in a strange land.

The Israelites have a convenient memory: Old Adam always does. It's their fault they're in Babylon. By their persistent disobedience to God, they've squandered everything He's given them. What do they do? They blame Him. Clearly, He's gotten tired or forgetful. In their opinion, this is His fault.

The Lord reminds them that He sits above the earth, so mighty that its inhabitants are like so many grasshoppers. He's the Creator who stretches out the heavens and numbers the stars, and He doesn't forget a one of them. He brings princes to nothing: a puff of His breath and they wither away. In other words, the Lord has not grown tired, weak or weary. He remains eternally all-powerful. If the Israelites are in trouble, it's not because God is powerless to help them.

It's because they don't want His help. Back in Jerusalem, they turned to all sorts of false gods, to the point where they actually placed their idols in *the Lord's* temple. By word and deed, they said, "We want them to take care of us instead." So God let them have their way. He permitted the people to have what they wanted. He stood ready. He didn't forget them or His promises. He kept to His Word faithfully. They didn't want Him.

Do you not know? It's been understood since the foundations of the earth. The Lord has acted this way since creating Adam and Eve. He made them and promised them all good things forever, but they chose sin and death instead. God made Israel His chosen people and promised them all good things, and they chose sin and death instead, too.

So there they are – the people of Israel, captives in Babylon. It's the people, not God, who have changed. They've forgotten God's Law and His Promises, and they've turned to other gods. But they blame Him. And as long as they blame Him, they won't look to Him for salvation.

But the Lord is faithful. He hasn't changed. Thus the text goes on:

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. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. 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.

Behold the Lord at work in the Gospel lesson, keeping His Word. Become flesh, He walks among His people. Rather than almightily slap some sense into them, He works in mercy. He gives power to the faint: the sick are brought to them and He heals them, demonstrating His authority over disease and death. He casts out evil spirits, demonstrating His power over the devil. He is renewing the strength of the weary, and behold how He does so: He shoulders their weariness. He bears their infirmities. He takes on the guilt of their sin. He carries it to the cross, where the Son of God will be publicly shamed and killed by the world. He'll die for them and rise again. That is how the Lord chiefly uses His power: in mercy and pity, to save people from sin and death.

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"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?"

Here's what you know already. There's plenty to worry about, and you don't have to look far. There are big concerns like the economy and personal finances, laws that pressure Christians to go against conscience, the ongoing threat of terrorism, and more. Secularism and immorality rule the day. Then there are the individual troubles you have. Illness. Family tension. Goals missed and dreams lost. Guilt over past sins. Shame inflicted by others. Stress and anxiety. On and on and on.

You know all that already. It fills your mind more than you want.

Here's something you'd better know, too: your old sinful nature has a plan, and it's not just to make you have a bad day or joyless life. Your Old Adam is working hard to make you say that God has forgotten you or forsaken you. That's the plan to get you to deny the faith and turn to other gods.

Here's one other thing that you may not know, because we don't frame it this way very often: there are a lot of false gods tempting you right now. After all, an idol is anything we fear, love and trust more than God. Idols abound. Idolatry does, too.

For instance, to trust government—rather than God—for prosperity is to turn it into a false god; on the other hand, to fear government more than God makes it an idol, too. To fear or trust rulers or talk show hosts more than God is idolatry. To trust a free-market economy more than God is no better. Now, we must be perfectly clear: authorities exist because God puts authorities in place, and money is a gift of God for use in this world. But both authority and money can be sinfully abused, and both authority and money can be worshiped. Likewise, our nation's drift – headlong charge, whatever – into immorality is worship of the false god of individualism. It is to say, "I love what I want more than I fear the Law of God." These are common false gods in our land.

And then all of those personal trials are full of idols, too. Guilt can become a false god. It becomes an idol when the sinner says, "My guilt is so great that I can't be forgiven." This declares guilt to be greater than God—it fears guilt more than it trusts the Savior and grace. Afflictions tempt Christians to think God is angry with them, despite Jesus: at this point, they trust their feelings of fear more than God's promised mercy. Many people become attached, even addicted, to one pleasure or another, legal or not. It pulls them away from the Lord and His mercy. Then hearts harden and faith dies.

Eventually, all of these false gods fail. There is no salvation in them, and those who trust in them are lost. It is not that the Lord has forgotten or forsaken. Rather, despite the clear promises of God in His Word, people follow other gods. When they do so—when they replace the one true God with an idol, God doesn't coerce them to be saved. He *offers* salvation—He doesn't force it. He still calls out and bids them to repentance. But if they want the false god instead, it's left to the idol to do the saving—and false gods cannot save.

Be on your guard against idols. They are everywhere, and your sinful nature loves them all. Beware of the idol of pride, too: see, many will think that the trick here is to be strong enough to resist all these false gods. Noble as it may sound, it gives too much credit to sinners; for to believe that you can avoid all of this is to trust yourself way too much.

So now you've got something else to be worried about: your troubles aren't just troubles, but potential idols that can only condemn. But don't worry. Instead, repent. Repent of false gods, known and unknown. Repent of thinking the Lord has forgotten and forsaken you.

And rejoice. "Do *you* not know? Do *you* not hear? Has it not been told *you* from the beginning?"

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Creator and Ruler of all who sits above the earth. All the peoples of the earth are like grasshoppers in comparison. This does not mean that you are too small for His mercy; rather it means that nothing is so great as to separate you from Him. That same almighty Lord took on flesh among the "grasshoppers" of the world. Remember tonight's Gospel lesson, where He heals the sick and chases evil spirits away. His miracles demonstrate His power, even as His human flesh testifies that He has become like you to save you. He has submitted to death at the hands of "grasshoppers" to be your redeemer. He has borne your infirmities and sins to the cross and died with them there. By His death, He's conquered sin and death and devil. They have no power left, because He has defeated them all.

He numbers the stars, says Isaiah, and doesn't forget a one. But He didn't die for stars. He died for you. And having paid the price of His own blood, He will not forsake you now. Not now, not ever. Far from it! Instead, He humbly comes to you this night in His Word, absolving you of your sin. He comes to you in the Supper, giving you His body and blood for forgiveness. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might He increases strength—how? In His means of grace, for there He gives you His righteousness, His grace, His strength. His victory.

Have you not heard? You are not forgotten or forsaken. In Christ, you will mount up with wings as eagles. You will run and not be weary. You will walk and not faint. All this is yours in Christ for eternity. Have you not heard? Do you not know?

Now you know...that you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen