

And He Went Throughout
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First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
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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.

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 sunset, 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.

As I was pondering this message, a hymn popped into my head and, at first, I didn't give it much thought. Sometimes that happens out of the blue, especially with my favorites. As I continued pondering, though, the refrain kept running through my mind. I could have kept ignoring it but I figured I might as well check it out. I opened the Glory to God hymnal to *God of Grace and God of Glory*. As I read through the lyrics, I realized why it was stuck in my head.

It opens with "God of grace and God of glory, on thy people pour thy power." Isaiah tells a lost and exiled people "He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless." The people of Israel had been sent to Babylon and the days were so very dark. Their hope had dwindled and they cried out "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God." Isaiah tells them "no, it isn't so – the Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth – the Lord stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; the Lord brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. This God is still your God." On thy people pour thy power.

"Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour, for the facing of this hour." Our youths are fainting and weary; our young fall exhausted. These days are indeed dark and we cannot see the light of tomorrow. Being exiled had broken their hearts and their spirits – again they cry "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God."

"From the fears that long have bound us free our hearts to faith and praise." Isaiah tells the people that God has the power to do this and for those who wait for the Lord, their strength will be renewed. They will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not be weary, they will walk and not faint. To the God who can do this, who can free them, as they fly and run and walk away from exile toward home, they show faith and they have praise. No longer bound in captivity, their hearts have been freed for faith and praise.

“Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the living of these days, for the living of these days.” As we wait, for we know that waiting is not easy, no matter what our own personal exile looks like, we join with Israel in needing wisdom and courage for the living of these days. I have done my share of waiting on the Lord, and praying that our timelines would sync up, praying that God’s time and mine came together, sooner rather than later. I have prayed this prayer for others who are stuck waiting for the same. I have prayed this prayer when “God’s good time” felt nothing like that. Until we can sense our salvation, can see where our past has brought us, grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the living of these days.

“Cure thy children’s warring madness; bend our pride to thy control.” The connection is not exact but I cannot help but think of our reading from Mark. Mark wastes no time – by verse nine, Jesus is baptized, by verse twelve he is tempted in the wilderness. In verse sixteen Jesus is calling his disciples and in verse twenty-one, Jesus has begun his ministry. Before our reading today Jesus had just cured a man in the synagogue after teaching the people there. From the synagogue he goes straight to the home of two of his new disciples and finds Simon’s mother-in-law with a fever. In those days, a fever was thought to be caused by a demonic presence,¹ not unlike the one Jesus had just cast out of the man in the synagogue. Jesus touched her and she was healed. The “warring madness” of the hymn speaks to our desires to fight with one another and with God yet it can just as easily speak to the battles within us, with our own demons, if you will.

Throughout Mark, Jesus teaches and Jesus heals and, in our last verse of today’s reading, he makes it clear these go hand-in-hand. “And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.” In verse thirty-nine we learn the heart of Jesus’ ministry. In healing he brings wholeness to people, most often in a way that restores them to community. In teaching he brings wholeness to people in an entirely different way – restoring them to wholeness in their relationships with God. We understand this importance when we read the Ten Commandments and find the first four about our relationship with God and the last six about our relationships with others. We understand this when Jesus tells the lawyer, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”² Cure our warring madness and bend our pride to your control so that we are able to love God and one another.

“Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, lest we miss thy kingdom’s goal, lest we miss thy kingdom’s goal.” Again, cure us of our warring madness and bend our pride to your control. Help us

¹ *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 1*, p. 332 – Theological Perspective.

² Matthew 22:37-39.

work with you to be whole with this world for we cannot be whole within ourselves if we are not whole with this world. When our pride is bent to God's control, it disappears, it is obliterated in the best possible way. And when we seek peace and let go of pride, then we have not missed the goal of God's reign.

“Save us from weak resignation to the evils we deplore.” You have likely heard Paul's letter to the Romans where he confesses, not in a meek manner but boldly so that others might know solidarity in place of shame, “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do”³ Who among us has not had occasion to share this confession with Paul. Paul's words speak to personal resignation around personal evils. The hymn is global in its intent – save us from thinking nothing we do can change the things which break our hearts, the un-Godly things done by those with some sort of power. Let us not be resigned to poverty and terrorism and hunger and disease in under-developed and developing and developed countries. It does take strength to overcome such big things, so save us from weak resignation. Jesus come, take our hand, and lift us up to do what we assume we cannot.

“Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, serving thee whom we adore, serving thee whom we adore.” It is easy to read the account in Mark and dismiss the work of the healed mother-in-law as her subservient duty. More recent theologians have looked beneath the surface and claim her as the first to be compelled by Jesus' saving grace to a response of service. I like that. I like the idea that her grateful response is service. Jesus restores people to wholeness with God and community and they respond with service. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, serving thee whom we adore. So may it be for you and for me.

Let us pray: Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the living of these days, we pray. Amen.

³ Romans 7:15-19.