

Written Copy: Isaiah 40:28-31 "Who Is in Charge?"

5th Sunday @ Epiphany

Sunday, February 7th, 2021

Text: Isaiah 40:28-31

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 to him who has no might he increases strength. ³⁰ Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; ³¹ 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.

Exegetical Statement

Isaiah is speaking prophetically to the Jews 100 years into the future who have been exiled to Babylon. The LORD wants them to consider what they should've known and remembered, those things His prophets had been telling them which they ignored and forgot in their despondency over their current situation. They looked around and judged that God had abandoned them and was unwilling or unable to rescue them. Isaiah is ordered to speak words of comfort and truth to them. The LORD is the Creator and sustainer of all things in this vast Creation. Unlike the idols of the Babylonians He is not a part of Creation but exists outside of it. Even the most powerful nations and rulers are like insects to Him. He decides when they come to power and removes their power according to His will and command, making them less than nothing. He is beyond their understanding, there is no thing and no person in Creation to whom they can liken Him. Having reminded them of His transcendence He points out their false notions that He doesn't know or care about their plight. He is the sustaining God of not just inanimate objects of Creation but His beloved people. They still existed according to His mighty hand. When the time comes, He will empower them to return home and rebuild Jerusalem. Until that time He will sustain them in exile. Those who try to make a go of it apart from Him will not succeed. Even the youngest and strongest of them will grow weary and fall because of exhaustion. But He is the LORD God who renews the power and strength of His people so that they will run home without growing faint and walk to Jerusalem without becoming weak. He sustains His people physically and spiritually through His mighty Word.

Focus Statement:

The LORD created and sustains all things out of love for His children. He ordered all things to bring me to faith and keeps me in faith. He protects me in this life and grants me the strength to serve His will as a member of His Church. Through the gift of His Son I am forgiven for all the times I put Him in a box or try to control my life apart from Him. His goal in all things is that I will leave this land of exile and enter with His Son the Promised Land of eternal life to come. All that He allows to happen serves this purpose.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We see all the troubles in the world, can't see how God could possibly be working through them, and put Him in a box, unable to help us in all things. We make a god out of our health and existence, forgetting we all have a death to face one day. We forget that every day of our life is in the hands of the transcendent will of the Almighty God, to whom all things in Creation must serve, including us.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Stop worshiping the god of health, or the god of COVID-19 health mandates. See the knowledge and vaccines as His gracious gift that work only because He empowers them. Realize that our hope should only be in them. Realize that we all have a death in this world that will come according to the will and plan of the LORD who will keep us safe and take us into eternal life.

Subject Sentence: Trust, hope, and strength come only from the LORD.

Introduction: My Power to Protect Our Flex

As some of you already know our 2009 Ford Flex was involved in an accident before Christmas and was considered a total loss just before the year ended. We prayed about it, discussing different ways to replace it. Buying new was out of the question. But we trying to figure out whether to lease a new car of some sort or buy a used one. We both really liked the Flex, which Ford is no longer making. We liked it because it's a station wagon on steroids. It's big enough to comfortably seat 7 people, including the driver, or 5 people and one Bentley. So we ended up buying a 2018 Ford Flex. Compared with the 2009 it's like we've entered the 21st century with all the features it comes with, including a backup camera on a big display that actually works, unlike our 2009 model.

Although it's not brand new it's like brand new to us. It even has that new car smell. So we're taking precautions to keep it like that. No more eating in the car like we did in the old one. And while we were always careful drivers before, I find myself being even more careful now. Learning from what happened with the 2009, which was hit by a car running a red light, I am extra careful entering an intersection after the light changes. I watch it turn green, then I glance both ways, left and right, to make sure no one is running the red light, before I enter the intersection. Of course, this creates occasions where impatient people behind me get to honk their horns. If there was some way that I could arrange it, I would gladly let them go first in front of me as soon as, or even before the light changes. Let's see how much they're in a hurry after being hit by someone running the light. And I do my best not to run a light that's yellow, or even orange, meaning one that is yellow trending toward red, so as to not be the one who causes an accident. I am more patient when pulling out of my drive or a parking lot, waiting until I know I have plenty of time to safely enter traffic. In other words, I'm doing all I can to prevent another accident happening to this Flex.

But no matter how careful we are with this vehicle; it won't last forever. There will come a day when it quits running, and the cost to get it back on the road will be more than what it is worth. Even so, no matter how careful I drive, no matter how many precautions I take, there is still a chance that I could be involved in another accident. I would like to think that my defensive driving eliminates the possibility of this from happening. But the reality of life on the road is that no matter how careful I am, I can't override the carelessness of others. I can't stop someone else from running a red light, or veering into my lane and sideswiping me, or losing control in the snow and spinning around to hit me, or any other number of ways that I could be involved in an accident.

Now it may sound like I'm a pessimist. I certainly don't sound like an unbridled optimist. But maybe more accurately, when it comes to life on the road, I am a realist. There are some things I can control, but far more that are out of my control. How do you look at the reality of your life now? I mean not just driving, but living in a world filled with unrest, political polarization, life threatening diseases like cancer, and of course, the menace of COVID-19. How much control do you really have over your life? And how are you coping with that lack of control?

God's Word of Reality and Encouragement to the Exiles

In our Old Testament Lesson today the LORD is speaking through the mouth of His prophet Isaiah to His chosen people, who are dealing with the reality that they lack control over their situation. They are in exile in Babylon, under control of the mighty empire that swooped down on Judah and Jerusalem and destroyed the city and the temple. Against their will they were marched off the 900 plus miles to live in Babylon. For how long? Well, that's the worst part, they didn't know. The Babylonians seemed to think it would be forever. They were left heartbroken, homesick, and unsure if their God, the LORD God, would, or even could help them. They looked at their situation and saw themselves under complete control of the mighty Babylonian Empire, whose might and power they were no match for. And they wondered, where was God's hand in all this?

So the LORD sent them a wonderful message of hope from not only across the many miles, but across the years. Isaiah was directed by the Holy Spirit to write to these people living 100 years into the future. God told Isaiah to write in **Isaiah 40:1-2** **¹ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.**" 100 years before it would happen, the LORD sent them this message of comfort, strength, hope, and forgiveness. No matter how things looked now, He promised there would come a day when the exile was over. The LORD would forgive them for their sinful disobedience that made Him send them away, and he would restore them to their homeland.

It may have sounded great, but the exiles struggled to believe that this was possible. That's because they were looking only at what they had the power to do and had forgotten or stopped believing in what their God had done in the past for their ancestors and could/would do again. God's message is not a glossing over of their present situation with an optimism that has no basis in reality. Instead, it's His faithful and powerful cure for their pessimistic outlook. It's His realistic message of what is to come.

First of all He needed to remind them of who He really was. The Babylonians when they conquered Jerusalem and marched the exiles away told them that their god had defeated the God of Judah and Jerusalem, and that they were fools to have trusted in Him. That's the message of pessimism. The reality of the situation was that the only reason Babylon had been successful was because the LORD God directed them to come, allowed and empowered them to break down the walls of Jerusalem, and allowed them to take His people into captivity as part of His will and plan to cure them of idol worship and repeated, unrepentant, sinful disobedience.

So His message begins. **Isaiah 40:21-22** ²¹ **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?** 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 dwell in;** Don't you recall what I told you in My Word by the faithful prophets? What Moses wrote down for you? I am the One and Only LORD God who created all things and sustains all things. Do you want to know how great and magnificent I am? Go out at night and look up into the sky. Look at the multitude of stars, more than you can count or name. But not more than I can count or name. I created every single one of them, and I have numbered and named them all. They come out every night by my powerful working. I keep the earth rotating on its axis so there is night and day. I keep the powers of the universe in order so that even as I am stretching out the universe, all things hold together by my command. And where am I in all this? Not like the Babylonian god who is an idol manufactured from things of creation. I exist and make my home above and beyond the circle of the earth. I am apart and above Creation.

And what is the power and might of the Babylonian Empire and its rulers to me? They are to me like insects, like grasshoppers. The LORD testifies in His Words of truth that He is the One (**Isaiah 40:23-24**) ²³ **who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.** ²⁴ **Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.** The only reason that Babylon exists as the mighty empire, the only reason that their king rules with the power that He has, is that the LORD allows him to, and has set him in place according to the LORD's own purposes. It is the LORD alone who grants authority to kings and empires, for the sole purpose of accomplishing His will. And when He is done with them, He removes them from power, making them like dust or chaff that blows away in the wind. He controls the works of all nations and leader. And whether they believe in Him or not, they all must serve His will and plan in all things.

His people in exile were discouraged, tired, and weak. They knew there was nothing they could do to save themselves. And that was not a pessimistic view, but the reality of the situation. But not the reality of the LORD's situation, plan, and purpose for them. **Isaiah 40:28-31** 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 to him who has no might he increases strength.** ³⁰ **Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted;** ³¹ **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.** What sinful man is too weak to accomplish the LORD is not. He is the Creator of all things, and the sustainer of all things, not just the inanimate objects like the stars, but especially of His people. They are the reason He keeps the stars in the sky and the earth spinning. His purpose in sustaining all things is for the ultimate salvation and welfare of those whom He calls to be His people, His nation, His Church, you and me.

God's Word of Encouragement and Strength to Us

We live today in an exile of sorts. As you've undoubtedly heard before, our view of this world should be "The Earth is not my home." We live in exile in a foreign land. In what is not a pessimistic, but realistic take on our life today we are surrounded by numerous problems and situations that are beyond our control. The LORD has given to us these words written by the prophet Isaiah as His message to us today too. **Isaiah 40:1-2** ¹ **Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.** ² **Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins."** This prophetic promise finds its complete fulfillment in the Word made flesh sent to us to grant us not just comfort and hope for this life but stretching into eternity.

The one who is comfort, hope, and salvation in the flesh is the One who is the subject of our Gospel Lesson: Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Messiah, the Christ, The Son of God who became the Son of Man. We see Him healing all manner of disease and problems, physical and spiritual. Yet all those around Him saw Him as being their help for strictly the problems of this world. That's why the disciples were eager for Him to stay in Capernaum. They wanted Him to stay and keep healing. They envisioned Him setting up the Jesus of Nazareth Memorial Hospital so that all could be healed from earthly disease and affliction. The thing is, all those mentioned in **Mark 1:34a** **And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons,** all of them were destined to die again. The Jesus of Nazareth Memorial Hospital would've provided comfort for now, but in the end all who were healed would eventually die and be destined to suffer for an eternity with the demons that afflicted them.

Jesus came with a message and mission far greater than that. It was a mission that only the One True God who creates and sustains all things could accomplish. Jesus came to climb upon the cross and be the once and for all sacrifice that would provide the reason why the exiles could be forgiven for their sinful acts, their doubts, and their lack of faith. Jesus came to show all humanity just how powerful God works to save all mankind. How He planned this salvation from the beginning of time and then put it into motion, working through those who believed as well as those who did not. Jesus willingly went to His death on the cross to show the love that is behind God's desire to save all men because He loved them too much to see them lost forever. Jesus came to provide all that was needed. And He sent the Holy Spirit to make the salvation He accomplished for all men available to you, and to all who would believe by the faith given in the Gospel Message. It's His gift that goes beyond healing what's wrong in this world. Through the Spirit's work in the Gospel He brings healing now and for eternity. It's His free gift to you, bought and paid for by the love of Jesus. It's His message to each and every one of you: not one of pessimism, or unbridled optimism, but the realistic truth of where we stand in faith, right now.

God's Word of Reality for 2021 and Beyond

It's His message to you in the midst of all the suffering, political unrest, and COVID-19 pandemic that is our life in 2021. But is that what you have been focusing your faith on? I want to pause here for just a moment let you take a realistic look at where your hope lies. Where are you placing your trust? Who are you placing your trust in? When it comes to COVID-19 for instance, how much trust do you put in masks and social distancing? How should we look at these things realistically as Christians? The knowledge we have about the Virus and how to protect ourselves is a good and gracious gift from the LORD. But most of the health officials that study the Virus and inform us how to protect ourselves do not see it this way. They place their trust in the god of science, medicine, and human knowledge, instead of the LORD God from whom all these are a gift. How can you know if you've put your trust there too? When you assume that just because someone walks by you that is not wearing a mask that you will be infected with the Virus. When you believe that when someone violates the social distancing law, the consequence of infection is inevitable. It's as if we say to ourselves, "Someone near me violated the law of COVID-19 prevention, so no one can help me, not even God. It's as if we even assume the LORD is saying, "Well, I didn't want you to get the Virus, but there was no mask, and you were sitting 4 feet from another person instead of 6 feet, so there is nothing I can do. You are trusting in the wrong god when your fear of the Virus is greater than your faith in the God who rules over all things, including the Virus.

To those living in that kind of fear the LORD God says **Isaiah 40:28-29** 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 to him who has no might he increases strength.** Truly the power to survive this Virus comes from the LORD God, whether you contract it or not. Even the Vaccine is a gift from the LORD that works by His power and might. And just as with those who Jesus healed in His day, so too in our lives: we all have a date with death. This is not me being pessimistic, but realistic. There is a day sometime in the future, a day I have no idea when it will be, but a day when I will depart from this earth. It may be the result of a heart attack, a car accident, or even COVID-19. And no matter what that means are there is no plan, no measure, no vaccine, no mask or social distancing that will prevent it from happening. And when I look to earthly means try to prevent this eventuality, I am putting my faith in the wrong place, in the wrong god.

Conclusion

So, how should I live my life as a Christian in 2021? By caring for my life as the gift from God that it is. By not living in total unrealistic optimism that there is no reason for me to worry about the virus or take measures designed to slow the spread. To ignore God's gifts of preventing Virus transmission would be to succumb to the devil's temptation in **Matthew 4:5-7** ⁵ **Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple** ⁶ **and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you,'and "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"** ⁷ **Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"** If life is a precious gift I should do what I can to protect it. At the same time I should not adopt the pessimistic view of those who trust in the gods of this age that if anyone even accidentally violates the CDC Commands of mask wearing and 6-foot distancing there no one that can help them. The LORD bids us to have a much different view of life now. **Psalms 139:16-17** ¹⁶ **Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.** ¹⁷ **How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!** It is the LORD alone who knew me before I was born, saw me in the womb, and knew the date and time of my birth before any doctor. It is He alone who knows every day of my life, including the day when my life will end. And to Him my life is precious, more precious than it is even to me. He came to earth to die to save me and grant me life eternal. That's His message to me, and to you. God is greater than we can imagine, and He works in great and magnificent ways for you.

Need not fear death. All powerful LORD uses it to welcome me into life everlasting:

But there is a day coming when my life will end. Yet I have no reason to live in fear. In **Luke 23:42-43** where the thief on the cross hangs dying we read ⁴² **And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."** ⁴³ **And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."** On that day that the LORD has chosen to be your last day, Jesus will say the same thing to you, **"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."** Put your trust, your hope, your faith in that God who can say this as the absolute truth. Then live your life not in fear of COVID-19 or any other disease but using all the gifts of knowledge and medicine He has provided to serve Him in His kingdom, witnessing your trust and faith not in mankind, but in your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen