

“The Lift”

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Isaiah 40: 21-31

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The scripture passage we read today might be partly familiar to you. It is a very hope-filled passage that speaks of the sovereignty of God. But the prophet Isaiah isn't delivering this message to happy and light-hearted people with no cares or concerns. He delivers this message to the people in exile — who had been taken by force to another country. They were weary and weighed down. It seemed to them that God had forgotten them, and that life would never go back to normal and forever be hard, as weeks turned to months and months turned to years.

It has been a long 7 months. As the pandemic gains more traction and as the glorious fall begins to give way to the darker days and eventual winter, many people are feeling weary. Of course, even without a pandemic we all have burdens we carry. What burdens are you carrying? If we went around the room I don't think you'd find a single person who wasn't carrying a heavy burden of some kind. Life is hard.

The book of Job says *“For hardship does not spring from the soil, nor does trouble sprout from the ground. Yet human beings are born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.”* Job: 5:6-7

Whether it is our health, pressures from work, relationship troubles, financial worries, significant changes in life or all the heaviness in the world from the politics in the south to ongoing racism in Canada, there is plenty for us to be concerned about. From time to time we all suffer under the weight of bad relationships, bad health, bad cash-flow and bad news. So let's forget about ourselves for a minute, and pretend we're eagles.

Not so long ago most experts believed that eagles only did short migrations, not the long distance flights that the little birds do – it just didn't seem possible for such big birds to fly very far. Now we know that eagles migrate from Alaska in the fall to the Southern U.S. and Mexico to spend the winter. How do they do it? They need to glide as much as possible and use powered flight – where they flap their wings—as little as possible.



The wings of the eagle are designed such that they can take advantage of even the slightest upward current of air. They deliberately fly close to mountains to catch thermals – the warm up-thrusts of air. With the help of good air currents, an eagle can take off at dawn and not land once

until dusk.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could catch some thermals from time to time?

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 strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; 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.

(Isaiah 40:28-31)

How do we do that?

There are a number of ways. Here are some of my top choices:

- Find regular ways to connect to the Source. Everyday, every week find time to connect to God. Who will renew their strength? *Those who wait for the Lord.* Wait is not waiting around reading your Twitter feed hoping that God will get here soon. Waiting on the Lord is showing up and being present to and expecting God's presence. Find ways to remember that the Lord is Everlasting and that God has not forgotten you. Generally, it's we who forget God. It is so easy to get distracted or to focus so much on the problem that we forget to look up. Looking up can take many forms: devotionals, quiet walks, singing or listening to Christian music, praying, meditating – something that works for you, that grounds you or reminds you of who you are and whose you are.
- If you have a burden to bear, acknowledge it, and try to accept it. It's not always appropriate to accept it, but often half the problem of our burden is our fighting and resisting it in the first place. We are not promised an easy life, and some of these burdens we are called to bear. We may not understand why we are going through what we are, but accepting that this is the way it is makes it easier to bear. So

accept those long lines to get into the grocery store, or the fact that the protocols are different in that church from this church. It goes back to the serenity prayer, doesn't it? "Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change". We make our burdens so much heavier when we resist carrying the ones we have no choice about carrying.

- Like that eagle, try to flap your wings less and glide more. I can remember, when I took some swim lessons with the local swim team, we would often be told to swim a set, like 400 meters of IM, and then we'd take a break at the wall and he'd teach and we'd do another set. But sometimes instead of giving us a break he would tell us that we should make certain laps "recovery laps". Instead of stopping at the wall we had to keep going ... but we had to relax as we swam so we could prepare for a number of intense laps. "Recovery laps" always sounded like an oxymoron to me, but I realize that in life sometimes we don't get a real break from whatever we are carrying – parenting young children or caring for an infirm spouse are examples where you just don't get a real break. Somehow, we need to build in recovery laps. We need to find ways to make a day or part of a day lighter.

Maybe that means not sweating the small stuff and letting go of perfection. Maybe that means doing what needs to be done at a slower more relaxed pace. Sometimes, especially when we grew up with a lot of drama and stress, we can get addicted to drama and we jump from one crisis to another. Somehow we need to breathe more and not turn every little parking ticket or critical comment into a crisis. Don't swim every lap tense, with all your muscles flexed. Actually the swim coach was always telling us that you swim faster when you relax. And it's true! You don't float well when you are all tense. You float and you swim better when you are relaxed. The same is true of us. While there's a whole lot out there we can't control and perhaps we can't even control the fact that we have to carry this burden, we can control how we carry it.

- Help someone carry their load. Helping others makes us feel lighter and better. Reach out to someone every day and tell them you're thinking about them and that you hope they have a great day. It's so simple and everyone can do that. Pick up the phone; write a text or FB messenger. I'm always amazed at how it touches people but also how good it makes me feel.
- Practice gratitude. Being thankful was not just for last weekend. I like what Rev. Donald had to say on a Thanksgiving Sunday about being grateful in the "whatevers". We hear that so often it sounds like a cliché, but study after study tell us gratitude make us feel

better. But gratitude isn't easy, especially when you are carrying a weight. It takes discipline — but it really changes you. When you feel heavy or anxious, increase your gratitude.

One of the things that is interesting about this piece of scripture is that little bit at the end that you maybe know by heart:

“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.”

Those little triplets are common throughout Hebrew scripture. But typically they build in importance so that the most important statement is the last one. So this one is curious. You would expect it be the other way around “Those who **wait** for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall **walk** and not faint, they shall **run** and not be weary, they shall **mount up with wings** like eagles.” But I think it's deliberately the opposite. It may be a reflection on aging – we start life full of beans and craving adventure and we gradually slow down. But I think that in the end that life is not about attaining great speed or power but learning to put one foot in front of the other in a life of simple, faithful trust and service.

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. Put your life in the hands of the one who never grows weary and you will find your burdens easier, and even worth carrying. Amen.