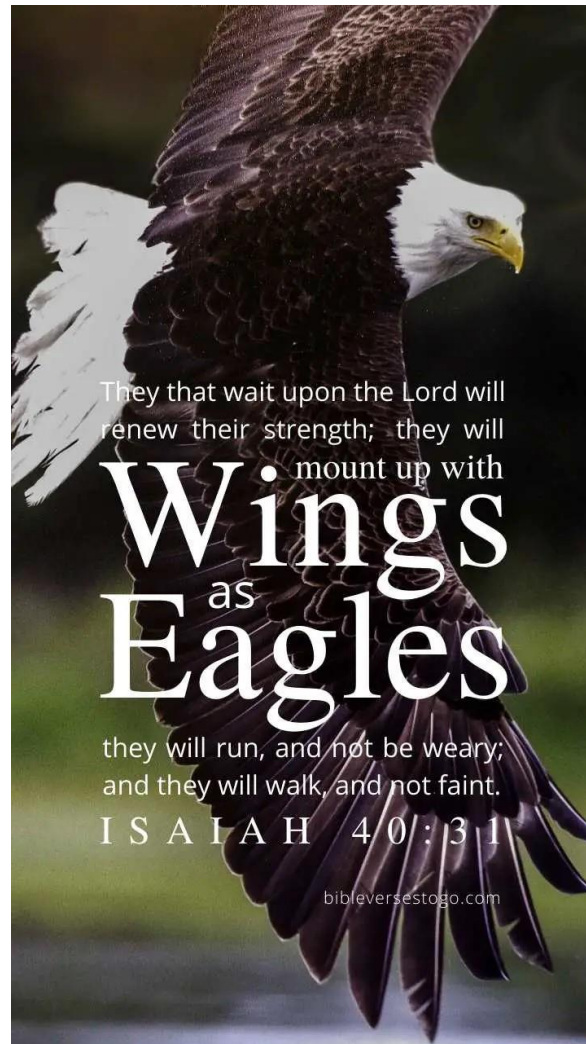


February 4, 2024  
“Waiting Upon the Lord”  
Isaiah 40:28-31; Mark 1:29-39  
Rev. Amy Wood, Associate Pastor



Mark 1:29-39

29As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34And 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.

35In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. 36And Simon and his companions hunted for him. 37When they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” 38He 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.” 39And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

This is the Word of God for the People of God... Thanks be to God.

Prayer for illumination:

Open our hearts to receive your message of grace and healing.... In Jesus' name... Amen.

Pop Quiz Time!

Which of these sayings is not in the Bible?

- A. God works in mysterious ways.
- B. God helps those who help themselves.
- C. Everything happens for a reason.
- D. God won't give you more than you can handle.
- E. None of these are in the Bible
- F. They're all in the Bible

The answer is E... None of these statements are in the Bible. Yet, we hear them all the time, especially when we are going through a rough time. If we're honest, we've all probably said these a few times to offer comfort to someone else. We want to say something that will help, something that will make sense of things, something that will make us feel better, even if it doesn't do anything for the person who is struggling. But, none of these sayings are in the Bible. We don't have enough time to go through all these sayings today—we could have a sermon on each one, but we'll start with “God doesn't give you more than you can handle”.

We know that isn't true. Think of any number of people in the Bible- Job, or Jesus at Gethsemane, or Paul who's list of trials would be too long. The reality is that we all face struggles that are too much for us to handle on our own. Struggles that leave us weak and weary. Struggles that take our breath away and shock our systems. None of us are immune.

Kate Bowler is a church history professor at Duke University and the author of many books including, “Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I've Loved.” If you are going through a time of struggle, I highly recommend her work. Kate was diagnosed with stage IV cancer at the age of 35. She went through a time when she thought that she wouldn't live to see her son start Kindergarten. In her books and podcasts, she shares a lot of her experience, offering blessings for those who have faced difficulties in life. Last week on a webinar, she shared that she reached a time in her dark days when she could hardly stand to go to the mall and walk around. Everything was so bright and shiny that she could hardly stand it. It made her want to scream about how unfair life was. Then, she promised herself that when she went to the mall, she wouldn't look at the slick window displays, but at the people who were walking by. When she looked into their eyes, she saw the mother struggling with her toddler. The older man struggling to walk with a walker. The teen who was trying to do anything fit in. She saw real people, struggling with their own problems. And, she felt less alone.

When we are going through struggles, through health scares or relationship crises, or just the ordinary annoyances of life, we can feel like we're all alone—and some of those sayings at the beginning make us feel like we are failures which just increases the isolation that we feel. We don't feel worthy, we feel lost, we feel like the rest of the world knows something that we don't, when if we look closely into the eyes of those around us, we see a beautiful brokenness (Kate Bowler's words). We see all kinds of people going through all kinds of... stuff.... And we feel less alone. Everyone has something. Everyone is carrying a burden that feels too heavy at times. Everyone gets to a point when they feel weighed down, faint and weary.

And, here's the hope and the good news—God cares about each and every one of us. The God who created the universe cares about you and your struggles, no matter how great or small.

Isaiah 40 was written at a time when God's people had been living in exile. They had been slaves, servants in Babylon, and had been scattered from the land that they had come from. They were at a crossroads, trying to figure out which direction to go, and they wondered if they could trust in God anymore. They wondered if God had forgotten about them. In ways, they felt separated from God, hidden from him, disregarded by God.

Sounds familiar?

Yet, Isaiah reminded them that the God who created the universe, the God who has been there from the beginning, doesn't grow faint or weary. God doesn't give up on God's people. God doesn't abandon God's people. God's love never fails.

All of us will grow faint and weary. We will fall exhausted when we try on our own, but Isaiah says, "those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. They shall mount up on wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." These famous words are in the Bible, for we have seen time and time again, that when we "wait upon" the Lord, God gives us strength.

When Isaiah talks about waiting upon the Lord, it isn't the waiting that we are used to... It isn't standing in line, our foot tapping because the line is moving too slowly. It isn't punching the elevator button over and over again to try to make it come faster. It isn't checking our watch a million times at the stoplight. It isn't that kind of waiting... Isaiah isn't using "wait" in this way. Rather, the prophet is asking us to pay attention to what already is. We are asked to know that God is among us, around us, within us already. Waiting on the Lord, in this case, means putting our trust in God. It's putting our hope in God. It's reaching out and saying God, I'm tired and weary. I can't do this on my own. I know that you see me and will make something good come of this because you've done it over and over again. Help me. Strengthen me. Take my hand and lead me.

This is one of the reasons that we come together in worship. We come to remind each other of who God is and God's desire for the world to be a place of peace and wholeness and grace. We each come with unseen wounds, and we need the reminders that God is the everlasting God, the creator of the universe. A God who loves and cares intimately for each heart and each soul. I think if I were God, I'd be caught up in the beauty of the stars and creation, yet God has shown over and over that God cares about individuals.

Our gospel reading today that tells of the healing of Simon's mother in law is another reminder and shows that God cares about what Pastor Joy J. Moore calls the intimate places of our lives (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twb3bzVsmnU>). Jesus had just been in the synagogue healing—a very public place. Then, he goes next door, into the home of Simon and Andrew, and he's told about Simon's mother-in-Law who is sick in bed. He immediately goes to her and takes her by the hand and lifts her up. Immediately, she is healed and she goes about serving them—kind of a weird ending that we'll get back to in a few moments.

But, this short story reveals to us how much God cares for us in the moments of our deepest need, in our most intimate places. God sees us as we are, enters into the intimate places of our lives, and loves us. We don't have to do anything to deserve that love and grace—it's a free gift—that when we accept it, brings true healing—not always a cure, but healing.

Many of you know Debbie Wright. She's shared her faith through song for us in worship on occasion and has been an active part of the community for many years. Several years ago at a church potluck, Debbie contracted botulism. I don't want to tell too much of her story, because it's much better coming from her, but she wanted to share with you how the God of the universe carried her through some extremely difficult moments in her life, and we pray her story will offer hope to you if you are going through one of those moments of struggle, hardship or suffering.

In the waiting, in the searching  
In the healing and the hurting  
Like a blessing buried in the broken pieces  
Every minute, every moment  
Where I've been and where I'm going  
Even when I didn't know it or couldn't see it  
There was Jesus.  
There was Jesus.

Friends, our God walks with you today. Every minute, every moment. Where you've been and where you're going. Even when you don't know it or see it. There is Jesus.

You may be thinking, yes, but why did God cure Debbie but not me, my friend, my family member. I can tell you that I don't know why miracles take place sometimes and not others. It's not that one person is more worthy than another, one person has a stronger faith than another. That's not the way that God works. Healing doesn't depend on your worthiness. Jesus' presence with you through times of trials doesn't depend on your worthiness. And, here's the tough thing that we have to consider- Jesus can bring healing without bringing a cure. Healing is a restoring to wholeness, to life and we can be whole without being cured.

Our healing comes on our waiting on Jesus, on our trusting that God will make something good come from terrible situations that take our breath away. Healing comes when we reach out to take Jesus's hand and Jesus takes ours.

Then, we can mount up on Eagle's wings—run and not grow weary, walk and not faint. Like Peter's mother-in-law, we can rise to serve Jesus—serving here is the same verb that was used to talk about the way the angels cared for Jesus in the wilderness or that the women cared for Jesus in His ministry.

We are healed to go forth, to share the good news for others who are walking through those moments of brokenness and pain and heartache. Those who are like the Israelites and wondering they can trust that God cares about them. Those who feel invisible to God. Maybe, just maybe, your healing can offer hope to another—a reminder that our God is a God of love and grace, a God who seeks the best for us and wants to give us abundant life.

As we close today, I share with you one of Kate Bowler's Blessings and it is my prayer for you. This is "A Blessing For those who are weary...."

O God, I am so tired,  
each breath is shallow  
and too much work.

My strength has melted away  
and hope is hidden behind a wall.  
I am alone in this.

O God, I cry out to you from the ends of the earth,  
show me again how this works—how you bring dry bones to life.  
Help me.

God have mercy.

Christ have mercy.

Spirit have mercy.

'come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,  
and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

Blessed are we, the weary and weak and sore,  
with only the merest ember left burning  
but who still say:

breathe on me, God,  
breathe life into my tired body, my heavy limbs,  
bring light to the dark corners of my mind,  
breathe comfort into my sad heart.

Enkindle my awareness  
of what I was meant to be  
and do.

Blessed are we  
who turn our gaze  
to seek the One who truly sees us, and knows us,  
like newborns whose bleary sight

focus to find adoring eyes beaming down,  
delighting and filling, mirroring and multiplying.  
Blessed are we who discover we are loved and held,  
in arms that are strong enough  
to hold what we cannot.

God have mercy.

Christ have mercy.

Spirit have mercy.

Those who wait upon the Lord, will find new strength.

Isaiah 40:31

Settle yourself for awhile, where some warmth and light and comfort can reach you. Wait and watch. What has been done in love is never lost.

Love never fails.

1 Corinthians 13:8