
Wait for the Lord! Wait like the Lord!

**A sermon by the Rev. Canon Lauren Holder
Epiphany 5 – Year B**

*Have you not known?
Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
The Creator of the ends of the earth.
Amen.*

Friends, I am struck this morning by the beauty and power of our text from the prophet Isaiah. And I am struck by the hymn we heard just before our Gospel text!

If thou but trust in God to guide thee...

Oh, how I long to sing that haunting tune with your collective voices ringing in my ears!
Please God, please God, may we lift our voices *together* in praise to you, soon and very soon.
Amen.

This text from Isaiah is one you know well... though you may not yet realize it. Today we have only heard the last ten verses of Isaiah 40.

If we started at the beginning, we would hear the familiar refrain, "Comfort, O comfort my people." We would hear, "A voice cries out: In the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord..." And we would be transported back to Advent, back to the music of Handel's *Messiah*, lending art to the words: *Every valley shall be exalted...* and every mountain and hill made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places plain.

Friends, can I tell you something about this beloved text? It was written in exile. It was written while the Israelites were far from Judah, longing for their homes and their worship places and their common life. It is an ancient text with a timeless message that speaks especially to us, especially today, while we wait for the day when we can come together in our church home and raise our voices in one accord.

And I know that the church is not a building—I know that God is not contained in these walls—I've preached that message! But I also know that there are days where some of us... all of us.. feel like we're in exile.
Comfort, O comfort my people!

If you read Isaiah 40 in its entirety, it is long and lovely. Much like my Tuesdays. I begin the day with Women's Bible study at 7am, and I end with High School Bible study at 7:30pm. Long—yes—but oh so lovely.

This past week, I started Tuesday with a question to early morning crew: Where do you see God in our world... what do you see God doing? The responses were honest and varied. Perhaps because we have been studying the psalms, honest prayers of praise and lament, our group expressed the same. Lament that God feels distant or absent, and praise that God is made present in lovingkindness of friends or the beauty of nature.

I ended the day with a centering prayer practice, led by our seminarian and embraced by our high school crew. After reading a psalm describing the longing we feel for the "dwelling places" of God, we engaged the questions: Where do we experience God? In that space, what are some names we have for God? And then we spent seven minutes—yes, seven minutes—contemplating the varied and beautiful names of God in

silence. Friends, let's all take a moment to pray for our youth, because they are an absolute *blessing* to this church. Their wisdom and faithfulness is moving mountains. Amen.

Here is the truth that I hear in these sacred conversations and in our sacred text: Get ready! God is coming. Pay attention! God is here. You want to worship the stars in the sky? Our God created the stars! You want to worship the waters and the deep? Our God created the deep—and the wide—and the high... Our God is the God of the universe. The Lord of history. The beginning and end of all wisdom and all time and all being.

The prophet asks rhetorically: Have you not known? Have you not heard?

In other words: Are you not astounded by this incomparable God?

The prophet speaks to a people in exile: God created ALL THINGS—everything! Even you! Even you in exile, even you in despair—God created all. And God created you in love. And God, who loves you, is with you always. Even in exile. Especially then. Trust in this God who creates and redeems and renews and sustains all things—all people—you.

So what in the world does this good news—this prophetic word—have to do with our Gospel text from Mark? So many things. But I will only highlight two.

First, look at who Jesus is. Second, look at what Jesus does.

Jesus is the creative, redemptive, renewing presence of God incarnate. Just look at his care for Simon's mother-in-law. Jesus touches her—he takes her by the hand. Jesus restores her—he lifts her up. In our distress, God is present in a real and palpable way, eager to raise us up and give us new life—a life of discipleship and hospitality and service—a life that embodies the very love that Jesus makes real among us.

But Jesus, even Jesus, does not preach and heal and serve on his own. No. Jesus seeks a deserted place for solitude and prayer. Jesus seeks sacred time and space to know and love and commune with God. There is no preaching, no healing, no community with first communing with the God who lovingly creates, redeems and sustains us!

Look back at Isaiah's words: "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." Wow. That's some serious strength... some awesome endurance... those are some encouraging words, no? But this strength and endurance does not fall in our laps—it doesn't even fall into Jesus' lap! This strength and endurance is born out of relationship—out of trust—out of asking ourselves: where did we see God show up this week? And out of seven-minutes of contemplating the name and presence of God. Even with the laments of absence. Even with the distractions of a busy mind. Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. Not those who wait for the Lord perfectly with perfect words and perfect thoughts. Nope. Just wait for the Lord. Just wait, and pay attention, and trust.

I don't mean to invite passivity. Just waiting isn't passive. Some of the folks who waited seven-minutes on Tuesday will tell you—it's work! Others will tell you it's a balm to the soul. Both truths are right.

Waiting for God isn't passive because waiting doesn't do the work for us... but it's part of the work. It's part of the transformation that strengthens us for the work ahead. Sitting with God and naming God won't end the pandemic—at least, not in and of itself. But sitting with God and naming God will help you see and know God in new and deeper ways, giving you the strength that even Jesus sought to keep up the work and heal the world.

Who trusts in God's unchanging love builds on a rock that nought can move...

Find a deserted place and pray. Let Jesus take you by the hand and lift you up. Serve the world with gladness, hoping in the changeless love of God who creates, redeems, renews and sustains all things. Even you. Amen.