

“Be Born in Us Today — Bringing RENEWAL”

Advent 2 12/04/2022

Isaiah 40:28-31 ILC/FELC/ZLC

The text for this 2nd Sunday of Advent is from Isaiah 40:28-31.

“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 to him who has no might He increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; 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.” Isa. 40:28-31

Soon we’ll start to hear **Christmas music** playing in the stores and on the radio. Many of us have come to especially love certain Christmas carols, in **particular**, like “O Holy Night”...and not just to see if the soloist will be able to hit that super high “D”, either! First written in 1843 by French poet Placide Cappeau, the lyrics were translated into English a few years later by an **American** pastor, John Sullivan Dwight.

What you may not **know** is that the carol’s initial **popularity** is often traced to its **third stanza**, cherished by **abolitionists** in the United States who were fighting for the freedom of African-American **slaves**. Lines from that stanza read: *“Truly He taught us to love one another; His law is love and His gospel is peace; Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother, And in His Name all oppression shall cease ...”*

These days the carol may be appreciated for still **another** reason: its recognition of a very **WEARY** world. The carol sings in **stanza 1**: *“Long lay the world in sin and error pining, ’Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth. A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices, For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn ...”* The carol pictures a very “weary world” thrilled by the hope of an end to a long and **exhausting** life of unabated “**sin and error**.”

But “O Holy Night” doesn’t stand **alone** in this recognition of a “weary world”. Edmund Sears’ “**It Came Upon the Midnight Clear**,” written in 1849, also describes the song of the Christmas angels floating over a “weary world” in **stanza 2**: *“Still through the cloven skies they come, With peaceful wings unfurled, And still their heav’nly music floats, O’er all the WEARY WORLD ...”*

Nor does it end with **THAT** carol! Some call it “A Carol for the Despairing” but “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” originally was a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, written on **Christmas** right in the middle of the **Civil War**...America’s bloodiest war. **WEARY** of war, Longfellow wrote in his **third stanza** these lyrics: *“And in **despair** I bowed my **head**; “There is no peace on earth,” I said; “For hate is strong, And mocks the song, Of peace on earth, good-will to men!”*

Just two years after Longfellow wrote this poem and put it to song, Longfellow wrote a letter to his friend Henry Ingersoll Bowditch in post-civil war **1866**, *“The death of the young men in the war makes my heart **bleed** whenever I think of it...particularly on that cold December night when I came back with **my son**, and saw you at the rail station and knew that **yours** would come back to you **no more**.”* This is the **landscape** in which Longfellow wrote his carol.

We aren’t currently entrenched in a **literal** civil war—although it often feels like it **politically** and **culturally**, if not **SPIRITUALLY**—but the cracks in our country’s foundation are splitting wider. People **with** power **abuse** it; people **without** it **suffer**. Day after day, the **NEWS** cycles through **horrors**! Many days, it feels a little bit like the **end of the world** is coming. And as a matter of **fact**...it **IS**! You see, a significant part of the **message OF**, as well as the **reason FOR** the **ADVENT SEASON** is that with the coming of Christ, “**the end is NEAR**”...the end of all the **WEARINESS** that envelopes a sinful world populated by sinful **PEOPLE** doing sinful **THINGS**.

So, with a cue from our **carols**, let me ask you: Are you feeling **weary** more often these days? **Tired? Fatigued?** Does it look like the song of the angels this Christmas will be floating across a weary **YOU**? Do you maybe find yourself “**in the middle of in-between**,” waiting for resolution or reconciliation or vindication or at least some **positive** change—but with none of it in sight? What has **YOU** weary? Are you weary of your **circumstances**, your **age**, your **illness**, your **relationships**, your **job**?

In J. R. R. Tolkien’s “*The Fellowship of the Ring*,” the hobbit **Bilbo Baggins** says to **Gandalf**: *“I am **old**, Gandalf. I don’t **look** it, but I am beginning to **feel** it in my heart of **hearts**. Well-preserved indeed! Why, I feel all **thin**, sort of **stretched**, if you know what I mean: **like butter that has been scraped over too much bread**. That can’t be right. I need a **change**, or something.”*

Do you also feel **stretched thin**? Are you winded or exhausted from a pace that has you **spent**...**physically**, **emotionally** and even **spiritually**? Have you just about given up **hope** that we can solve **ANY** of our big problems: the economy, wars, pandemics, immigration, and wokeism? Is it all too **much**—this grueling **marathon** that life has become?

There are many ways we can go when we're **wearied** by life. But instead of sticking our heads in the sand like the mythical **ostrich**, the Prophet Isaiah in our text this morning counsels that with the **Lord's** strength, we can soar like an **eagle**! Yet **weary** people are often **difficult** people. We can live with **despair**. We can **complain**. And we can **blame**. How does the old proverb go? *"It's hard to soar like an eagle when you're surrounded by turkeys."* But when we get **weary**, we may not see the **needs** of those **around** us or the **opportunities** right before our eyes.

Even in each of us who've been redeemed and forgiven through the blood of **Christ**, while we walk this earth, there's still this struggle between **weariness** and being **strong** in the Lord. It's one aspect of what Martin Luther referred to in Latin as God's people being "**simul iustus et peccator**"... the paradox of **simultaneously** being both a **saint**, as well as a **sinner**. Or as American poet **Carl Sandburg** is credited with this introspective thought: *"There is an eagle in me that wants to soar, and there is a hippopotamus in me that wants to wallow in the mud."*

This text from Isaiah addresses the "**wallowing hippo**" in **each** of us. "**Weary**" is all over this text. Isaiah first uses the word to establish that "**God HIMSELF** does **NOT** faint or grow weary." Now that's **good news**, knowing that the One Who's running the **universe**, Isaiah says, doesn't **fatigue**. You and **I** would, if any of **US** were God! But thank God we're **not** God! With all God has to **do** and to **be**, you'd expect God would get weary at **some** point! I mean, God always **has been** and **will** be God, and that's a mighty long **marathon** of divine responsibility with some very **high expectations**!

But Isaiah assures us that God **NEVER** feels—how did **Bilbo** put it?—"*all thin, sort of stretched, like butter that has been scraped over too much bread.*" In fact, Isaiah says God gives "**power to the faint**" and increases the strength of those with no strength **left**! In the long history of God and humanity, God has **always** been our "strength for the weary", as well as a **second**, if not **third** wind for those of us who are ready to **FALL**.

Do you see what's **happening** here? Isaiah spoke words of comfort to people **weary** of the long wait for a promised **Messiah**. He was initially speaking to a **chosen people**—beleaguered by bad Babylonians—who were losing their sense of **being** chosen. Isaiah's words of comfort and assurance were for those who had forgotten the chapter of their history titled, "**The Exodus**", and those who had spent **decades** as exiles in a strange land. Today, Isaiah's comfort also reaches any of **us** who want to follow Jesus but who still find ourselves **weak** and **weary** from dealing daily with the ravages of living in a world of **sin**. But instead of bellowing like some NFL line coach, "**Brace up! Lean into it! Dig deep! Don't go soft on me now!**" Isaiah doesn't even say, "Be **strong**!" or "Be **courageous**!"

What Isaiah **does** do, though, is bring to **remembrance** the God Who has always **been there** for the weary. *“Have you not **known**?”* he asks. *“Have you not **heard**?”* Or to put it another way, *“Don’t you **REMEMBER**? Have you forgotten?”* Isaiah is a **“remembrancer”**. Did you know that historically, kings had **“remembrancers”** in their court—that’s the actual **title USED** for them—to remind the king of significant past events **OR** commitments, lest the kingdom suffer consequences from **forgetting** past events.

So then, what we have in our **TEXT** this morning is a **remembrancer** speech, a **comfort** speech, veering us **away from** our **inwardly-oriented weariness** to remembering a tireless, all-wise, all-powerful God Who **ALWAYS** will remember His **COVENANT** with His people. Isaiah has us remember who God **is** and what God is **like** in vss. 28 & 29: *“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 to him who has no might he increases strength.”*

More than **this**, though, Isaiah turns us to **God alone**, Who’s able to offer divine **strength** to renew us with His promises and to **REPLACE** our weariness with **HOPE**. There’s a wonderful **exchange** in this that I know some of you have experienced **personally**. The exchange is **YOUR WEAKNESS** for the **LORD’S STRENGTH**. Isaiah puts it **this** way in vss. 29-31: *“He gives power to the faint, and to him who **has** no might he **increases** strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; 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**”*.

Who **doesn’t** want to soar like an **eagle**? Even **Jesus** says, *“They shall mount up on wings like eagles.”* The image presents an eagle **ascending**, well beyond expected boundaries. Eagles **DO** that. They can fly at altitudes of 10,000-15,000 feet! You know, it isn’t a **new** image...this picture of an **ascending eagle**. When God brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt, God said in Ex. 19:4, *“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, **and how I bore you on eagles’ wings** and brought you to **Myself**.”* (Isaiah, no doubt, is doing some “remembrancing” here). Our God has a history of taking the **weary** and putting us into eagle-like flight.

The Advent season is here to remind us who are getting so physically, mentally and spiritually exhausted from this increasingly **weary world**, that for those of us on **this side** of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Savior has come to exchange our long weariness of **“sin and error”** and renew us with a thrilling hope that rejoices in the strength of Christ to overcome sin, death and a **very** draining and tiring world.

This is the God we know and the God we trust to **RENEW** our strength every day...as in one of St. Paul's letters, 2 Cor. 12:20, when the Apostle Paul remembered how even in his **weakest** moments, God's strength had come through. "**When I am weak,**" he wrote, "*then I am strong*". That is someone acquainted with the exchange of the **Lord's strength for our weary weakness.**

But this **ADVENT** is meant to finally bring **RENEWAL** to the lives of God's redeemed and forgiven people. God is bringing His **kingdom** to us...the culmination of His gracious rule over our hearts and lives. The last thing we find in the Bible is a description in Rev. 21:1 & 4 of "*a new heaven and a new earth,*" with "*no more death or mourning or crying or pain*". **MEANWHILE**, the world is **always** in process of **ending**...and one day, it **WILL** end. Justice is never done, but one day, it **will** roll down like a river! But you and I who trust in Christ alone for our salvation won't have to be concerned, because it was in **CHRIST HIMSELF** that both **justice** and **mercy** found their perfect balance and **fulfilment** for us.

Don't let the weariness of watching your savings or retirement account shrink by the **month** while your grocery bill increases by the **day** rob you of the **JOY** set before you when Christ comes to **RENEW** both your weary body **and** soul. In the **last chapter** of the **last book** of the Bible, we're assured in Rev. 22:6 & 20 by **Christ Himself**, "*I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the Root and the Descendant of David, the bright Morning Star.*"... "**And surely I am coming soon.**" The question **IS**, "Are you **READY** for His return or too weary "*from being spread too thin*" to stay **alert**?"

I recently came across a story about Ben Wood, who founded Shepherds Home in Wisconsin for boys and girls with developmental disabilities. Wood said, "*Do you know what our biggest maintenance problem at Shepherds is? Dirty windows! Our kids press their hands and faces against the windows, because they're looking to the sky to see if today might be the day that Jesus will return for them and take them to His home where they will be healed and complete.*"

So let us not be too **weary** to ask God's help to regularly run to the window, lest we lose heart for the Day when "*...the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will be with the Lord forever.*" (1 Thess. 4:16-17)

Meanwhile, Christ **additionally** gives us this encouraging invitation and **promise** in Matt. 11:28, “***Come to Me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you REST.***” **Rest** for the weary. “*A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn ...*”

So we pray, “*Jesus, **RENEW** us by once again being born in us **today.***” Amen.