

Sunday, March 29, 2020

Rev. Robert W. Brown

SERMON

Those Who Wait

Isaiah 40:1-8, 28-31

INTRODUCTION:

The exiled Israelites were badly in need of hope. After nearly a generation of captivity they had grown weary and wondered if Yahweh had forgotten them forever. At long last, the prophet Isaiah comes with this Word of encouragement and promise. God had not abandoned them and their rescue was at hand.

May these words bring us comfort and reassurance in our exile. To a dislocated, uncertain and weary people in a strange and foreign land, the prophet speaks...



SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 40:1-8, 28-31

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

³ A voice cries out:
"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

⁵ Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

⁶ A voice says, "Cry out!"
And I said, "What shall I cry?"

All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;

surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand forever.

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 strengthens the powerless.

³⁰ Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;

³¹ 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.

SERMON

God of our rescue, open our minds and soften our hearts to receive the comfort you offer us this morning. In an ever-changing world, your Word stands forever. This morning, may my temporal words and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to You, our rock and our redeemer. AMEN.

It is truly amazing that we can gather like this. We connect through wireless technology to actually see and hear one another in real time. This was unthinkable 20 years ago. And yet, as advanced as we are in technology, science and medicine, the core essence of our human condition remains the same. The signature characteristics and the events that compose a life, repeat over and over in every generation. All human history shares a remarkably similar story. Stories of birth, growth, emotion, aspiration, conflict, and mortality are universal. All great writing is a distillation of the human condition. These stories become archetypes that resonate through time. Within these stories we can find the essential truths that give us insight into our shared human drama and help us make meaning of our life. Our own Scriptures can often be best understood as eternal archetype stories that reveal the essential truths that endure.

What is unique about the Bible is that it enables us to see into a deeper reality, a reality that operates through and beyond our temporal condition. Over and over again, the Biblical narrative tells about God's fierce love for humanity. For those who have ears to hear it, Scripture reflects an enduring truth that guides our life and points to something greater than ourselves. These words have the power to sustain our hope when we are on the edge of hopelessness. These words can transform the anxiety of uncertainty into confident assurance, especially in the most difficult of times.

In today's reading from Isaiah, for instance, the prophet speaks to a bewildered people who wonder if there can be any future beyond the misery they suffer in exile. They openly wonder if God has simply forgotten them. Had Yahweh, the God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, the God who parted the Red Sea and led them from captivity to liberation, completely abandoned them? Maybe this God never even existed at all and the whole Hebrew mythology is just a made-up story.

At times like these, is when the prophets always show up to make the same two points; yes, there is a God, and you're not it. Isaiah reminds the people that your life is not about you. You're like withering grass and fading flowers. It's about an everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth who, unlike humans, does not grow weary and always rescues those who reach out. The prophets tell us that this is the God who is even now on the move and rescue is at hand. But where does that leave us today?

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We suddenly find ourselves thrust into a world we could not even imagine a month ago. The Corona virus has brought the entire modern world to a screeching halt. And this is just the beginning of our modern exile. We have miles to go and even if we do return home, we will be a different people. Like it or not, we are on the hero's journey.

This past week, as we tried to reorient our reality, many of us wanted to identify the most vulnerable among us so that we might find ways to be helpful. Naturally the elderly are most at risk and often sequestered in isolation. So, we began to reach out to the elders we knew at TriCon. I spoke with a number of people I knew from TriCon and my wider network who were alone. Not surprisingly, in conversation with our elders, I heard the prophet's voice. Their lived experience through many valleys and across high mountains has taught them essential truths that echo our scriptural archetypes. This is wisdom and insight I heard.

One man said, "All my life I've been surrounded by people who were so kind. No matter what was going on around them they remained kind. So I try always to be kind."

Another wise woman said, "Every tragedy is an invitation to love as Christ loved. It is in the hard times that we refocus from self to others. Mutual suffering seems to foster mutual caring."

Another long time TriCon member reflected for a moment on the joys and sorrows of her life and said. "You know, life is hard. I don't know how I have survived all these things, but I do know that I somehow came through them all and eventually found a diamond that was formed in the pressure... but you have to stick around long enough and search it out."

One man, sequestered in his small room in a local assisted living facility said, "When I can break free of my self-pity, I am able to see something beautiful every day. There is joy is waiting to be discovered all around us. It's just that sometimes I'm too self-involved to see it."

Speaking with these prophets, I began to understand something profoundly beautiful about our God. Divine rescue always involves the kindness, sacrifice and courage of

other human beings. In the case of the Babylonian exile, liberation came through the Persian conqueror of Babylonia, Cyrus the Great, who gave the Jews permission to return home. God always invites us to participate in our own rescue!

We don't have to be emperors; we only need to listen to the prophets among us. Let's start with being kind. No matter what, be kind. Let's love, as Christ taught us. Let's love our neighbors by reaching out with a hand written note of encouragement, a phone call or text message, or even a driveway chat at a safe distance. It's going to be a long haul here. Our rescue will come, God is even now on the move, and as we wait on the Lord, our strength will be renewed as we simply to show up for each other. It's really simple. Call your mother, be kind to your spouse, share your toilet paper, find something beautiful in every day and look for some kind of joy to sustain your hope and restore your strength.

In the vapor of time that is our temporal life, when all is stripped away, we are left with one essential truth that endures forever and is our only purpose. Love one another. That my friends is the word of our God. The word of God that will stand forever. How will you love this week? Stop by our Zoom @ Noon gatherings and tell your story.