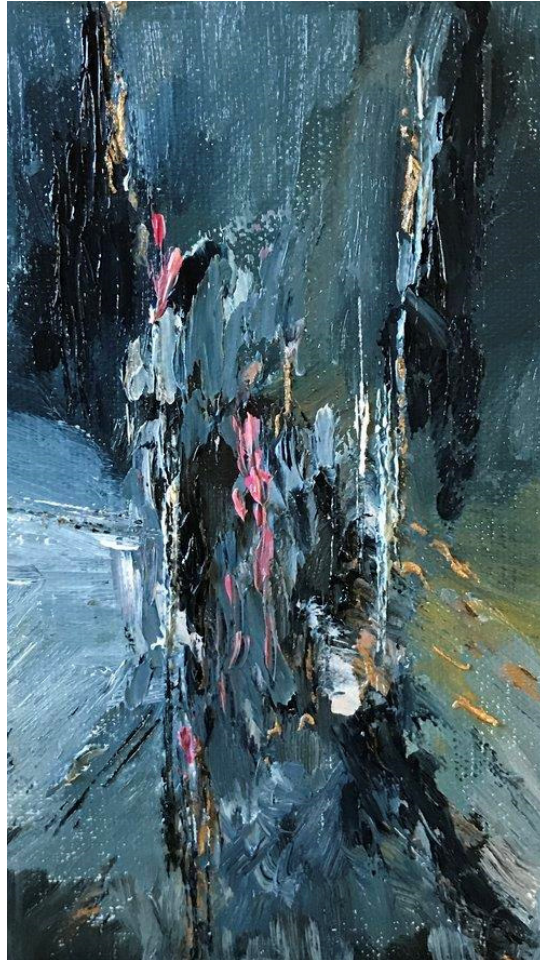


Power to the Faint

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



"With Wings Like Eagles" by Mandy Miller

Prayer of Illumination

God of mercy, you promised never to break your covenant
with us. Amid all the changing words of our generation,
speak your eternal Word that does not change.
Then may we respond to your gracious promises
with faithful and obedient lives; through
our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Background

Isaiah reminds us of an important truth that's all too easy to forget:

God is on the throne.

In the good times and the bad times. The unseen hand is guiding, even powerful princes. God is our Creator, Lord of all creation. God's mere breath of heaven, withers even the most mighty. As Isaiah says, all of us are like grasshoppers in the grand scheme of things. But when we're feeling small or insignificant or in a world of hurt or confusion, all we need to do is look up. Lift up our eyes. The Holy One has no equal. He is great in strength, mighty in power. And he's compassionate and loving, especially to the down and out and discouraged. We are his children, not just grasshoppers.

Let's hear now from the Prophet Isaiah of the divine strength we can receive in our human weakness, from

Scripture: Isaiah 40:21-31 (NRSVue)

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?
²² It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers,
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain
and spreads them like a tent to live in,
²³ who brings princes to naught
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.

²⁴ Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,
when he blows upon them, and they wither,
and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

²⁵ To whom, then, will you compare me,
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.
²⁶ Lift up your eyes on high and see:
Who created these?
He who brings out their host and numbers them,
calling them all by name;
because he is great in strength,
mighty in power,
not one is missing.

²⁷ Why do you say, O Jacob,
and assert, O Israel,

“My way is hidden from the Lord,
and my right is disregarded by my God”?
²⁸ 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.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – “Power to the Faint”

Does anyone here this morning have a birthday on the 29th of February? What year is that?
...Leap Year.

In fact, this year, 2024 is a Leap Year. If you’re born on February 29th, you’re not only born in a special year, but you have a special name. People born on February 29th are called **leaplings** or **leapers** because of **Leap Year**. The fact that leaplings only get an official birthday every four years can present some interesting issues.



Motivational speaker Tony Robbins can rightfully claim that he published his first big seller at the tender age of six.

Rapper Ja Rule produced his first album when he was five.



The Gilbert and Sullivan classic opera, “The Pirates of Penzance,” is comically based upon the problem leaper’s fate. The hero of “Penzance” is Fredrick, who was mistakenly apprenticed to

“pirates” instead of “pilots.” Still, his indentured service was due to end up when he turned twenty-one. Unfortunately for Fredrick, he was a “leapling,” and so while he was supposed to be freed in 1897, his “twenty-first” birthday, the pirates declare that he is bound to serve them until 1940—the year in which he would celebrate his twenty-first “February 29th” birthday. At least his girlfriend Mabel was willing to “wait for him,” for another forty-three years!

Our passage this morning challenges us to not only wait upon the Lord, but to take a leap as well. A giant leap. Not of one day, one year, or four years, but 200 years. There’s a 200-year jump between Isaiah 39 and Isaiah 40. And this was a tough 200 years of exile for the people of Israel. Isaiah 39 predicts Israel’s exile to Babylon. Isaiah 40 jumps 200 years to the end of their Babylonian exile.

And so the book of Isaiah can roughly be divided into two parts:
Isaiah 1-39 and Isaiah 40-66.

Part 1 deals with judgment,

Part 2 focuses on hope.

Part 1 braces for exile,

Part 2 prepares for homecoming.

Part 1 processes loss,

Part 2 of Isaiah anticipates newness.

Or to put it in Christian terms, Part 1 is crucifixion, Part 2 is resurrection.

Isaiah wants to challenge us leapers and leaplings this morning to take the LEAP, from Part 1 to Part 2. To be spiritual leapers and leaplings, we need to step out from the **affliction of Isaiah 39** and leap into the **comfort of Isaiah 40** that God offers. To get us from Isaiah 39 to Isaiah 40, the prophet asks us some questions:

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the earth from end to end. In other words, the Holy God is Lord of Time and Lord of Space. God’s power is inexhaustible and limitless and accessible. God is a self-giving God, generous with the strength he provides. The purpose of God’s power is to empower the faint and the weary. So if you’re in exile right now, you’re a perfect candidate for an exodus. In your affliction, God hasn’t lost sight of you or overlooked you. Wait upon the Lord. God isn’t a come and go God. He stays with us. And he’s a generous God. He doesn’t horde his inner reserves. God graciously shares his resources with us in our Isaiah 39 seasons of life to get us to our next chapter of life—the Isaiah 40 Life. God’s promises and actions are for the present, not just the past. God’s power and presence isn’t theoretical—It isn’t even up for debate.

The **Isaiah 40 Life** is designed for those times that we’re spiritually, emotionally, or physically:
deflated, depleted,
dilapidated, discouraged,
disoriented, or disappointed.

God is not like us. Unlike us, God doesn't lose hair, teeth, energy, or his marbles with time. God's waistline or list of aches and pains doesn't grow with time, like ours does. God never grows faint or weary—but *we can*. There are times when we feel either in body, mind, or soul like Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit*: "I feel thin, sort of stretched, like butter scraped over too much bread."

Have you been there before?

Maybe you're there now.

Maybe we're there now.

The good news is God gives us the power to do what we still need to do, while we have time on this earth. God refuels our empty spiritual tanks with hope and energy to keep moving forward, keep trusting, even when we're at a standstill.

The good news according to Isaiah reminds us that God gives power to the powerless. The Lord refreshes the washed up and worn out. There's a time God says, "enough is enough!" What you need now is comfort.

And this is where the Great Reversal, The Great Exchange kicks in. Give God your exhaustion and he will give you exhilaration. Or as Paul later says,

"When I am weak, he is strong."

To wait between Isaiah 39 and 40 is to trust—with patience and hope. To wait upon the Lord is a confident expectation that things are going to turn out OK—*no matter what*.

Erich Fromm, the German psychoanalyst and sociologist known for his book *"The Art of Loving,"* put it this way: "Hope means to be ready at every moment for that which is not yet born, and yet not become desperate if there is no birth in our lifetime. ...Don't manufacture it yourself. Don't look to temporary fixes. Look to God."

As Isaiah says, "God works for those who wait for him."

- With an Isaiah 40 faith, when we're feeling grounded, we trust *somehow, some way, we'll mount up with wings like eagles*.
- With an Isaiah 40 faith, even with blisters and bunions, we trust that we will *run and not be weary*, for those short bursts that we need to make.
- With an Isaiah 40 faith, we can *walk and not grow faint* in the daily grind. Instead, we can "rise and grind."

Along with Isaiah, we say to God, "Here I am, send me!" Isaiah gives us hope in our waiting, because we know The Messiah, The Anointed One is coming for us. Isaiah shaped Christ's understanding of himself and our understanding of Christ. Isaiah is quoted 86x in the New Testament. We were reminded of this on Christmas Eve when we read from [Isaiah 9:6](#):

A son has been born for us, a son has been given to us, and this is the name he has been given, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Jesus' mission statement during his time on earth was cut and paste from [Isaiah 61](#):

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me and has anointed me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and release to the prisoners.

Good Friday can be called good because of [Isaiah 53](#):

He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.

The very name Isaiah means "the Lord saves" and so we have hope. No matter where we find ourselves, God will come to the rescue. Before there was Doctors Without Borders (est. 1971), there were Doctors Without Land. In 1958 "Project Hope" was launched. "Project Hope:" was the vision of Dr. William B. Walsh, who had served as a physician aboard a destroyer in World War II. As he witnessed first-hand the poor health conditions of children in the South Pacific rim, Walsh envisioned a "floating medical center" that could visit the residents of those islands. Amazingly, Walsh persuaded President Eisenhower to donate the retired naval hospital ship the USS Consolation to his cause. It was refurbished and re-named "SS Hope."

HOPE was an acronym: "Health Opportunities for People Everywhere." In 1960, she set sail staffed with doctors, nurses, and technicians, devoted not just to offering health care to the residents of each place they made port, but to teach and train locals as new healers who would remain and continue to provide care. For the next 14 years, the sight of the big grey ship emblazoned with the huge red letters "**SS HOPE**" truly lifted hearts and gave hope to all who watched her arrival.

Immanuel, it's Christ who is our ultimate living, buoyant hope. In the words of Isaiah,

*Let those who go to sea set sail with praise in the air.
Let those who live along the waters' edge sing His praise.
Let them praise the One who is, was, and will be heard along the coasts.*

Amen

Sermon Art: "[With Wings Like Eagles](#)" by Mandy Miller

[God is on the throne](#) by We the Kingdom

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