

**Have You Not Heard
Isaiah 40: 21-31
Don Lincoln**

The lectionary is a three year cycle of Scriptures, intended to take us through a majority of the whole Bible. We're in year B; the fifth Sunday after Epiphany, and the Old Testament text for the fifth Sunday after Epiphany in year B is Isaiah 40: 21-31, which finishes like this:

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 strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; 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.

The last time this text showed up was three years ago, in 2018. And here is what was on the cover of the worship bulletin that Sunday.



Most of you probably don't remember that there was a notation that I had actually taken the picture of that eagle in my backyard.

But if you were in worship that Sunday you DO remember, most folks in the sanctuary were focused on something else. Because the 5th Sunday after Epiphany is always the first Sunday in February. How unlikely could it be that a text about mounting up with wings like eagles – a text that only shows up once every three years – would show up the year the Philadelphia Eagles were playing in the Super Bowl? What were the chances? I remember looking out at the pews in the sanctuary and seeing a sea of green jerseys. We were focused on one thing: winning! And we did.

But despite the fact that Tom Brady is playing **again** this year, how different the world is from that day three years ago.

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God.” How dearly the entire world needs to hear and understand and embrace the great truth of ONE everlasting God, sovereign over the universe, the LORD of all peoples and all nations who lifts up the weary.

Watch, as this video from Work of the People paraphrases the power of the fortieth chapter of Isaiah.

Video transcript:

What do you know about God? Do you ever get the chance to reflect on how all that is came to be? Who else but God could have done it? God, in full authority, looked upon Earth. God was stationed so high above, our world's inhabitants looked like insects. And then with such mastery, God laid out the skies and set them in motion. Have you ever looked up and got lost in their beauty? A canopy of clouds by day, stars by night.

God reminds us of our place in all things. Even those who carry the most power on earth will be humbled in the presence – rulers, judges, the rich and powerful, no one measures up to God's greatness. There are only so many breaths between birth and death. We make of our life what we can before the end, and we return to nothing more than scraps in the wind. God keeps telling us: “nothing compares to me, nothing and no one on earth.” All you have to do to know is gaze upon the stars! Who else could have placed them with such precision? Who else knows each star by name? Who else is wise enough to hold the skies together? The stars know who. They honor God. Shining salutations for the only One able to attend to them all.

So, to those of us who have God's Word; to those of us who are the beloved of God, how can we hold any thought that who we are and what we do goes unnoticed? How can we think that God forgets our needs? What do we know about God? We are all still learning. God is still teaching. God is the Eternal, the Everlasting, the Creator of all things big and small. We will never wear God out and we will never know the depths of God's divine wisdom. God strengthens us when we fall and invigorates us year in and

year out while we work and worry ourselves sick. The young aren't immune; they wear out too. Even the strongest get weak-kneed and stumble. Nevertheless, those who put their hope in the Eternal God will know their strength restored. They will fly high on wings like eagles. They will run full speed and not grow weary. They will walk miles and miles and never grow faint.

What do you know of God?

Earlier in the 40th chapter, the prophet Isaiah asks: "To whom will you liken God?" And he describes the handmade idols of Babylon where his people are captive. "Have you not known? Have you not heard? THE LORD is the everlasting God." How can a thing made of wood or silver or gold be better than the very One who **CREATED** the wood, silver and gold in the first place? The One "...who knows every star by name."

Three years ago when we heard this text our focus that day was on a winner and a loser. I'd say "**That was just a game,**" but you and I know how much that attitude pervades the whole of our lives. We **DO** have our idols. One is a pervasive, **idolatrous** narrative that claims the point of life is attaining social, economic and political power.¹ Winners and losers; getting and keeping mine; being in charge; too bad if I lord it over others. Power brokering; power mongering. Powering.

We see it. The relentless grasping for power and control consumes cable news stations, drives political processes and outcomes, and saturates the lives of people of every stripe. Whether persons seek power personally, or through their preferred political party, this pervasive, idolatrous narrative that teaches life is best when **you and I** are "the ruler of the earth."

Author Brian McLaren writes, "our growing list of global crises, together with our inability to address them effectively, give us strong evidence our world's dominant framing story – our preferred narrative – is failing."

He says, "If our framing story tells us the purpose of life is for individuals or nations to accumulate an abundance of possessions and to experience the maximum amount of pleasure during the maximum number of minutes of our short lives, then we have little reason to manage our consumption. If our framing story tells us that we are in a life-and-death competition with each other....then we will have little reason to seek reconciliation, and collaboration, and nonviolent resolution to our conflicts.

But if our framing story – our true narrative – tells us we are free and responsible creatures in a creation made by a good, wise, everlasting and loving God, and that our Creator wants us to pursue virtue, collaboration, peace and mutual care for one another and for all creation. Our lives can have profound meaning if we align ourselves with God's wisdom, character and dreams for us and the world. And if we do, our society may take a radically different direction and our world might even become a very different place.²

That's what Isaiah reminds us and reminds Israel of in this passage – that the story of God is a story where all power and authority is finally in the hands of the One “who stretches out the heavens like a curtain; and who also “brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.”

We are still learning. And thankfully the Everlasting God is still teaching us.

If COVID-19 has taught us one thing, it is that we are indeed, one common humanity. And the sooner we – as a world – align ourselves with the profound mystery that we are all the children of the LORD of the universe – sharing what has been given to ALL of us, instead of hoarding it for ourselves – the sooner all humanity will experience the only glory and wonder that can uphold us all. Especially when we are weary. Those who put their hope in the eternal God will know their strength restored; they will mount up with wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint because God does not forget our needs.

May it be so. AMEN

1. Paul D. Hanson, *Interpretation Commentary* on Isaiah 40-66.
2. Brian D. McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope*, 2007