

## Epiphany 5 / February 4, 2024

### Isaiah 40:29

**“He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might He increases strength.”**

#### **The Lord, the almighty, gives strength to the weak and weary**

The last third of Isaiah provides some of the most powerful testimony to the power and singularity of God. Nothing is beyond God’s power. He calls all things into existence and sustains them in being, by the power of His word. Not only is He unlike the gods of the nations, He is the only God who has existence. This is expressed throughout the scriptures from the beginning of God’s revelation, though in more subtle terms. Israel was given birth in a world in which people imagined a multiplicity of gods. The Lord went to war against the gods of the nations not simply to show that He is the most powerful God, but to show He is the only God. In chapter forty-four the Lord expressed His singularity most clearly declaring, “I am the first and the last; besides me there is no god.” The Lord won the battle against Pharaoh and his gods, against all the national deities who oppressed His people, because of His strength and because there is no other.

God showed His power and singularity in the most remarkable ways. First through the weakness of His people. Secondly by His apparent defeat by the gods of more powerful nations. In the ancient world, people believed war on the field of battle was an expression of war in the heavens between national deities. Despite the apparent bad optics, the Lord allowed the Babylonians to triumph, destroy His temple and take His people into exile. Who in the world wins by losing? No one in the world, but the Lord does not work according to the way of the world. In chapter fifty-five He said, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways.” Everything The Lord does is counterintuitive to the thinking, wisdom and way of the world. In the weakness of His people so prone to sin, He expressed His power to forgive. In the death of His people, conquered and exiled by Babylon, He showed His power to give life to the dead. In chapter forty-five Isaiah sang, “Truly, you are a God who hides yourself, O God of Israel, the Saviour.” God hid Himself in the weakness of His people to show His power by raising them up as a nation. God hid himself in the weakness of Jesus crucified and buried, so He would show His power by raising Him and all who receive Him as Saviour. The Lord gives strength to weak and sustains the weary in time and eternity.

In our text Isaiah sings, “He does not faint or grow weary...He gives power to the faint, and to Him who has no might He increases strength.” Those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength. All we have to do is wait! How good are you at waiting? Waiting isn’t a characteristic of our age. It doesn’t matter how quickly something arrives; we want it sooner. The time between writing a letter, posting it and receiving a reply, used to be counted in days and weeks. People today are practically apoplectic when their email is delayed or computer is running slow. God is in no hurry. He’s got all the time in the world. His sense of time is not our sense of time. We may have to wait a long time, but all things happen in His time. Isaiah sings, “Those who wait for the Lord will renew their strength.”

There is no quality or response of the human spirit God values more than faith. St. Paul writes, “We live by faith and not by sight.” In the letter to the Hebrews it says, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Waiting is the first cousin of faith and one of its most precious expressions in God’s eyes. In waiting we trust God to remember His promises. In waiting we rely on God to give us strength and encouragement in times of need. In waiting we believe God is with us, even when we cannot sense His presence or see any evidence of His work in the present moment.

We wait for the Lord, by remembering His actions in the past; in our lives and especially in the life of His people recorded in the scriptures. Instant gratification is the way of the world. Waiting patiently in faith is the way of the Lord. The descendants of Jacob waited 430 years in Egypt before the Lord brought them out of slavery and into the land He promised centuries earlier to their ancestors Abraham and Sarah. The exiles of Judah waited seventy years before the Lord did the most remarkable thing. He moved the heart of a pagan king to return them home from exile. The waiting was over. The faithful in Israel sang, “When the Lord restored Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouths were filled with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy.” The joy of Christmas and Epiphany is the coming of Jesus after ages of waiting. Our life in Christ is waiting for His return. We wait in confidence knowing the Lord will renew our spirits and give us His strength.

The Lord likes to make people wait. We wait upon the Lord to renew our strength. We wait upon the Lord to fulfill our hope. Noah waited six months for the waters of the flood to abate and the land to dry, so he could disembark and replenish the earth. The faithful in Israel waited centuries for the Lord to send the Messiah. In the temple on the fortieth day of Jesus' birth after a lifetime of waiting, an elderly man held the Christ child in his arms and blessed the Lord, saying, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation..." We have been awaiting the fullness of the Lord's salvation for almost two thousand years. We wait knowing that as Jesus first came in God's time, so He will return in His time. We wait in the Lord and in His strength.

Even the saints in heaven wait for the Lord to send Christ and make all things new. In Revelation chapter six the souls of those who had been slain for the sake of God's word cry out: "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long until you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" They are told to wait a little longer. Why does God make us wait? God waits so that more may hear the gospel, receive Christ and come to salvation. God's compassion is boundless. He continuously holds out welcoming hands to a sin weary world that more may come to repentance and receive the promise of salvation through faith in Christ. He waits so that those who believe may draw closer to Him in faith.

We can grow weary waiting, but the Lord does not grow weary waiting with us. The Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth, does not grow weary as humans do. The Psalmist sang, "My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber." God doesn't slumber, but He does give rest to His people so we may not grow weary in waiting. The psalmist also sang, "He gives to His beloved sleep." God doesn't sleep, but He gives us sleep, so we may be refreshed and not grow weary waiting. The Lord doesn't sleep. He watches over us as we rest in His peace. In Isaiah the servant of the Lord sang, "morning by morning He awakens me, to hear as one who is taught." We rest in His peace. He awakens us by His Spirit to hear. He speaks His word into our hearts. He refreshes our spirits through the water of forgiveness. He strengthens our faith through the bread and wine of Christ's holy body and precious blood. We can grow weary in waiting. The Lord is the everlasting. He does not grow weary. The Lord renews the strength of those who wait on Him. The Lord keeps His promises. Wait and you will see!

Have you ever been weary but had to stay awake? People who have to stay awake need an arsenal of products to help them fight off weariness. Caffeine pills, coffee, espresso, energy drinks. The Lord sustains His beloved with His word. The prophet Jeremiah sang, "Your words were found and I ate them, and your words were to me a joy and a delight of my heart." The Christian's energy source is God's holy word, spoken for our ears to hear, written for our eyes to see, embodied in Christ, received in our spirits through the water of baptism and the bread and wine of His holy communion. We hear the word, receive the sacraments, not simply in obedience to His command. We hear and receive, so that through them the Lord may renew our strength and lift up our spirits, so we may not grow weary as we wait upon His promise. The Lord renews the strength of those who wait on Him. As we wait, the Lord bless us with His grace and every gift of His Spirit that we may remain strong in faith. In Jesus' Name. Amen