

In Full Flight

Readings

Isaiah 40:21-31

²¹ 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 speak, 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 and not faint.

Psalm 147:1-11, 20c

¹ Praise the Lord!
How good it is to sing praises to our God;
for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.

² The Lord builds up Jerusalem;
he gathers the outcasts of Israel.

³ He heals the broken-hearted,
and binds up their wounds.

⁴ He determines the number of the stars;
he gives to all of them their names.

⁵ Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;
his understanding is beyond measure.

⁶ The Lord lifts up the downtrodden;
he casts the wicked to the ground.

⁷ Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;
make melody to our God on the lyre.

⁸ He covers the heavens with clouds,
prepares rain for the earth,
makes grass grow on the hills.

⁹ He gives to the animals their food,
and to the young ravens when they cry.

¹⁰ His delight is not in the strength of the horse,
nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner;

¹¹ but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him,
in those who hope in his steadfast love.

¹² Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem!
Praise your God, O Zion!

¹³ For he strengthens the bars of your gates;
he blesses your children within you.

¹⁴ He grants peace within your borders;
he fills you with the finest of wheat.

¹⁵ He sends out his command to the earth;
his word runs swiftly.

¹⁶ He gives snow like wool;
he scatters frost like ashes.

¹⁷ He hurls down hail like crumbs—
who can stand before his cold?

¹⁸ He sends out his word, and melts them;
he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow.

¹⁹ He declares his word to Jacob,
his statutes and ordinances to Israel.

²⁰ He has not dealt thus with any other nation;
they do not know his ordinances.

Praise the Lord!

Mark 1:29-39

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹ He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

³² That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³ And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴ And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

³⁵ In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶ And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷ When they found him, they said to him, 'Everyone is searching for you.' ³⁸ He answered, 'Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.' ³⁹ And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Hear what God's Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God!

Reflection

Reflection

Healing and wholeness come from you, O God.

Help us to be open to your Spirit moving in our lives.

Prompt us, nudge us and inspire us, that we may know you more deeply and serve you more fully, in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

When it comes to serving God, and ministering to others, how are you going?

Are you "in full flight" like the song said, or like in Isaiah 40 - rising on wings like eagles?

Or are you feeling a little weary, tired of the demands a life of discipleship sometimes seems to be? If so, perhaps the gospel we hear today can restore your soul...

Jesus has been teaching in the synagogue.

His words have astounded the crowds who have come to hear him.

His words are challenging them to think differently, to love differently.

And already, even early in his ministry, his words have proved uncomfortable for some.

He is no doubt a little weary when he and his friends retired to the home of Peter and Andrew.

Remember, Simon later became known as Peter, or Cephas, the rock.

But when they get there, the person who would usually organise the household and offer hospitality, Peter's mother-in-law, was unwell.

Jesus goes to her and lifts her up, and as he does, the fever leaves her and she begins to serve them.

On first glance, this story could sound a bit gender-biased to contemporary ears - the boys come home and find mum-in-law unwell, so Jesus heals her so she can wait on them.

For women who are not so comfortable with the hospitality thing, especially if it means serving a meal or baking a cake (not everyone is good at it!), reading the story this way can find us beating ourselves up for not living up to expectations.

But that would be selling short both what Jesus does and what Peter's mother-in-law does.

Jesus approaches this nameless woman and lifts her up - the language echoes what happens to Jesus on the cross as he is lifted up.

The fever leaves her. She is restored to health.

And she begins to serve them.

The Greek word used for what the woman does is *διδάσκει* (*diakonei*), which is often translated in English as “to serve” but also can be translated as “to minister.”

This is the same word used in Mark 1:13 to describe how the angels cared for Jesus in the wilderness - they “minister” to him - they provide what he needs to sustain life.

So Mark is describing what Simon’s mother-in-law does as something beyond mere hospitality.

It is the kind of hospitality that attends to whatever it is that another person needs, the kind of hospitality that makes the tea or pours a glass of water, that offers a fabulous cake, or a piece of bread and vegemite, but that also offers presence and purpose, conversation and encouragement, space to breathe and to be refreshed and renewed.

In ministering, “This woman provides what is necessary to sustain life, as does Jesus.”

(Seasons of the Spirit, p.170)

Jesus sustains our life, brings wholeness, so that we can offer life-sustaining love and wholeness to others.

A personal encounter with Jesus brings healing.

And then the “whole city” comes to Jesus - and verse 34 tells us that “he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons”.

The healing of an individual, then, is extended to the many.

The private moves to the public.

Just as our own personal experience of God’s love must extend to the many - must be shared.

Now before I go on, we have to acknowledge that physical healing is not always our experience.

We sometimes read these stories of healing (and the gospels are full of them), and we wonder why we still know illness, why the people we love so much still suffer in the way that they do.

There is no doubt the early disciples and the gospel writers wanted to emphasise Jesus’ ability to heal. In a world where when people got sick, there were few medicines, illnesses were not understood in the same way as we know them now, and sickness meant a person was unable to work and was often also regarded as less than whole and therefore excluded from the temple, Jesus, the healer, restored people to their God-given potential and restored their value in the midst of their families and communities.

Ailments were still a reality - Paul describes a “thorn in his side” that he prayed for release from but had to live with.

Jesus, the healer, restored people to their God-given potential and restored their value in the midst of their families and communities.

So one of the ways to look at this passage is to think about Jesus healing not only as something that frees us FROM some illness or exclusion from society, though that is amazing enough, but to think about Jesus’ healing as freeing us FOR something: taking who we are, despite all we are, and showing us we are important, and have something to give the world, where we can be the gift God has made us to be for the needs of the world. *(Spill The Beans, p.111)*.

The part that we heard earlier from Isaiah 40 was probably written for the people of Israel who were in exile in Babylon. They were a long way from the land God had promised them and beginning to wonder whether God had forgotten them.

Into this, God’s prophet speaks:

²⁸ Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
[God] does not faint or grow weary;
[God's] understanding is unsearchable.
²⁹ [God] 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.

So here's a question:

- what ministry or service have you been freed FOR?
- What might you be called to be in the world?
- Who are you be called to minister to? Or perhaps, how can you remain open and alert to the people who come into your circle who are in need of ministry?
- And how might we, together, in this community offer healing and restoration to those who are hurting?

The second part of the reading illustrates how important it is for us to maintain a balance between serving the world and attending to times of rest and restoration as well as prayer and giving time to deepening our relationship with God. The demands of the world's pain will always ask more of us.

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.

Holy One, who makes all things possible, lift us when we are weary.

Be our strength and fill us with hope as we seek to serve you and our neighbour this day and every day. Amen.