

Streetsville United Church  
Sunday, February 8, 2009  
Rev. John Tapscott

"STRENGTH FOR THE WEARY"

Isaiah 40:30,31

It is good for Christians to memorize Scripture, to have some favourite Bible promises at hand. Now it's not always by deliberate memorization that Scripture gets planted in us. Sometimes it happens because you've heard a particular verse so often. It also helps if the verse has a lyrical or logical flow to it. That's how I memorized Isaiah 40:31, "They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." In the church I attended for years the minister often used this verse as a call to worship. Whenever I think of him, and I do so fondly, for he helped and encouraged me in the process of becoming a minister, I also think of this verse, Isaiah 40:31.

Isaiah was speaking to the Hebrew exiles in Babylon. They had been there for a couple of generations and it seemed that God had forgotten them. God's promise to bring them home was still unfulfilled. The beloved city of Jerusalem and the temple was destroyed. So even if they did get home, the task of rebuilding would be enormous. Even young people were discouraged. Why worship? Why pray? Why hold out hope any longer? A kind of weariness came upon the people. So God inspired Isaiah to speak this strong word to them.(Isaiah 40:27-31) "Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hid from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God?" 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 to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youth shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted, but they who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

These words speak powerfully to us today. Perhaps it's just winter, but many of us feel weary, worn-out, exhausted. A person I know boarded a Mississauga bus, found a seat, and soon feel asleep. An hour later they woke up and were startled to see that they were back at the bus stop outside their home. Sound asleep they had missed the stop for the connecting bus. Of course, they were late for work that day. But we shouldn't be surprised. Many people are physically

weary, even youth. Experts tell us that we now sleep one hour less per night than we did a generation ago. It's due to the increasing pace and unrelenting demands of life. New technology promised to simplify life and give us increased leisure time. But the opposite seems to be happening.

People sometimes tell me that they are just too tired to come to worship on Sunday mornings. Their situation was captured in an episode of the Simpson's. On a Sunday morning Homer Simpson is sitting at home watching TV, when suddenly God appears and rips the roof off Simpson's house. "Homer Simpson," God says in a deep voice, "you've forsaken my church." And Homer says, trembling, "But God, I work six days a week and I'm tired, and Sunday is my only day off, and besides when I go to church, it's so boring and all they do is tell me how bad I am." God thinks for a moment and says, "You know Simpson, you've got a point." But these days many people are physically weary, too weary sometimes even to come to church, it seems.

Weariness can settle on our spirits, too. Sometimes we just get weary of waiting. How weary those students at York University must have become as they waited for the strike to end. I could understand their frustration. We sometimes get weary of waiting for God to act in our lives. We get weary of saying the same prayers over and over again. We become dispirited by the world and its problems. It's so easy to become frustrated, anxious and afraid.

Weariness can happen in our serving. The Bible tells us not to become weary in well-doing. But sometimes we do. We get tired of carrying the ball and shouldering the burden while others do little or nothing. If each member of the body of Christ did their share, no one would become worn-out. But unfortunately that's not the case, and so the point comes where people feel like throwing in the towel.

Now sometimes we don't have anyone to blame but ourselves for feeling weary. We don't use time wisely. We over-extend ourselves. We take on burdens we shouldn't, we try to take God's place, we try to control things we can't control and it becomes too much for us.

The point is that on many levels we become weary. That's how many people feel these days, perhaps some of us here.

But through Isaiah God speaks this strong word to the weary. "...they who wait for the Lord they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." God's word for the weary involves something we do and something God does.

First, look at what we do. "They who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." As long as the Hebrews were focussing on themselves they would remain weary in body and spirit. But by turning to God and waiting on him they would find their strength renewed and their spirits lifted.

So it is for us. Now staying home from church to rest might help, but that is only a half measure. Overcoming weariness involves waiting on God, deliberately turning to Him through worship and prayer and Scripture. Some people, when they come here are not waiting upon God, they can hardly wait until the service is over. But waiting upon God means turning your thoughts away from yourself towards the living God. It means coming with a sense of trust, bringing all your concerns and naming them before God with the expectation that God will do something in you and for you. In his book, "Something Beautiful for God", Malcolm Muggeridge tells how one day he heard Mother Teresa and her sisters praying in the chapel. He was amazed to hear them asking God for the smallest things needed in their work among the poor of Calcutta. At first he was offended, but then he realized, "If God cares to array the lilies of the field so splendidly, then assuredly Mother Teresa is right in believing that he cares about the tiniest necessities."

Overcoming weariness involves an action we take and that is to wait upon God. "They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength." Jesus often retreated into times of worship and prayer, in which he poured out his heart to his Father, and he emerged renewed and strengthened and ready to go again. seeking his will and his guidance and his help. If the Master waited upon God, so should we.

And then in return God does something for us. "They who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." As we wait upon God he renews our strength. Verse 29, "He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength."

"They who wait upon the Lord shall mount up with wings as eagles..." For one thing, God renews our strength by giving us a new perspective. If you are on the ground, you only see what's right in front of you. But if you are soaring like an eagle, you see the world from a higher, broader perspective. As we wait upon the Lord he reminds us that "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." God is the Lord, and we belong to him. His eye is upon us; he is fulfilling his promises in his own time and own way; at the best time and in the best way. Jesus lifted up Peter's mother-in-law from illness. So the power of the living Christ, who died and rose again, lifts us up. Of course He will lift us up to the Father's house on the last day, but even now he meets us here spirit to

spirit. He renews our courage. He lifts us above our present difficulties to see life from a wider perspective, an eternal perspective. The Lord helps us to prioritize our activities, to see and do what's really important and to cut out secondary things which only wear us down. Jesus himself did that. When people searched for him for more miracles he said, "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is why I came."

Here's another thing God does for us as he renews our strength. "They who wait upon the Lord shall... run and not be weary..." Soon God would be bringing his people home and some of the people would be running along the road with great enthusiasm. In the Bible running is a sign of enthusiasm, of passionate devotion to God and his service. Here in this place as we wait upon him, God rekindles our enthusiasm for life and faith and service.

"They who wait upon the Lord shall walk and not faint." As we wait upon the Lord, God renews our strength by helping us to persevere. That perhaps is what we need most of all, the strength to keep going, to keep believing, to keep praying, over the long haul, even when the going is tough. Many Christians fall by the wayside, but I admire people who keep running the race year after year with perseverance, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith..." They remember the Lord's promise that "they who endure to the end shall be saved." Winston Churchill was once invited to give a speech at a private boys school in England. He stood up at the podium and said, "Never ...never... never give up," and he sat down. As we wait upon the Lord he gives us the strength to persevere in our faith and service, to walk without fainting until that day the Lord calls us home.

"They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." Let me say that I experience the fulfilment of this promise in my own life, sometimes almost weekly. After I preach and lead worship, I do feel somewhat drained, but also renewed and strengthened from being in the Lord's presence and with the Lord's people, and charged up for the week ahead.

Some years ago, when I was still attending the church I spoke of at the beginning, a time came when the company I worked for went through some big changes. Everyone was concerned about their job, plus the company started demanding more and more from us. It was an anxious time. But one Sunday I went on a study retreat with other members of the church and on the way home I felt stronger, renewed, more confident, knowing that somehow I would come through that difficult time. I waited upon the Lord and he renewed my strength.

There is no shame in being weary in these demanding days. Jesus himself

often became weary in carrying out his work. But it's a shame to stay weary when God desires to renew us and replace our weariness with his strength. So let us wait upon the Lord that he may fulfill his promise in us and for us. Indeed, He may be doing that for you this very day, in these very moments. "They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."