

Becoming the People of God: With Wings Like Eagles
Mark 1:29-39
A sermon preached for Plymouth Presbyterian Church,
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A former police officer with the Los Angeles Police Department tells how the Department would demonstrate to rookie officers the value of the bullet-proof vests they'd been issued. The vests were placed on mannequins and then officers would fire round after round into the vests. The rookies were asked to check to see if any of the rounds had penetrated the vests. Invariably the vests would pass the test with flying colors. Vernon would turn to the rookie officers and ask, "So who wants to wear a vest and let us test how it works on you?"

How many of you would put on those vests and allow marksmen to take a shot at you?

I don't blame you. You could cover my entire body with that armor – and I'd still hesitate to put it on and let them shoot at me.

Why?

Because it's one thing to "say" I have faith

It's quite another to actually act on that faith.

You see, there are many things in this world that can threaten our feeling of safety and security. The plans, goals and the things that we desire in life can too often be threatened by powers beyond our own strength.

We might lose our jobs.

We might lose our financial security

We might lose our friendships.

We might lose our loved ones.

We might lose our sense of well-being because of health problems,

We might lose our feelings of peace and calm because of outside pressures and threats beyond our control (eg terrorism, or natural disasters).

At times like these it's easy to panic. It's easy to take our eyes off God's faithfulness and begin to look around for other forms of power and security.

But throughout Scripture God's message has always been to his people:

"Trust me."

"Put your faith in my promises."

"Rely on me."

Isaiah says just this to God's people, "Why do you say, Jacob, and speak, Israel, "My way is hidden from Yahweh, and the justice due me is disregarded by my God?" (v. 27).

Let me set the scene.

Judah was a very small kingdom surrounded by larger and more powerful nations. One of them was the powerful northern kingdom of Babylon. It had a fearsome army and a reputation of destroying any nation in their path... and Judah was smack dab in Babylon's way as it extended its borders.

The people of Judah felt vulnerable, weak and threatened. It was difficult to ignore the dangers that surrounded them.

They saw that they needed every advantage against such a formidable enemy and so they sought to strengthen themselves by praying to the gods of neighboring nations and making alliances with these pagan nations.

Why would they do this? Why on earth would they turn their back on God and seek out other sources of power?

Now, I admit that it's easy to sympathize with these people.

They lived in a very real world filled with very real dangers.

They were afraid.

They needed help from wherever they could get it.

They were fully aware of how ruthless and destructive the Babylonians could be.

They couldn't ignore the dangers that surrounded them.

I don't think it is any different for us. There are times when our happiness and peace are threatened.

- It may be the worry of our world exploding with bombs and bullets.
- May be you are feeling unsettled because no one shares your vision of what this church should be doing.
- It could be that you may feel as if you're all alone.
- Or perhaps there is no joy left in your work.
- Maybe you feel down-hearted about the path your children or grandchildren are taking.
- You may be upset about what you have said and done.
- You may be despondent about the same old temptation that causes you fall into old habits again and again.

Whatever it is that is unsettling you, it's good to remember that God has had plenty of experience with people who are fearful, discouraged and upset.

- ◆ Remember Elijah and how depressed and discouraged he became and all he wanted to do was to die.
- ◆ Or what about Moses when he had to deal with people who were so ungrateful and always rebelling against God. He must have wanted to throw his hands up in disgust and walk out on them when it all got a bit too much.

- ◆ Think about the disciples of Jesus out on a lake in a wild storm. Even though Jesus was there in the boat sleeping peacefully, they were convinced that the wind and the waves would all drown. They woke Jesus saying, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are dying?” (Mark 4:38).
- ◆ You know that’s the same question that God’s people asked in the Old Testament – “Lord, our enemies are surrounding us, don’t you care that we are about to be crushed by this Babylonian giant?”

And the answer that the prophet gives is one that is worth reading again and again when it seems that our troubles are more than we can bear.

If nothing else how about memorizing this one sentence, “Those who wait for the Lord will renew their strength” (v. 31).

You see the problem with the people of Judah was that they thought God had abandoned them or was too weak or far too removed to be bothered with their problems. And so Isaiah gives the people a reality check.

What’s wrong with you folks? Don’t you know? Haven’t you heard? Hasn’t anyone told you that God can do anything? We have a God who never gets tired of caring for us and loving us. Even when we think that God isn’t close to us and in fact, find it hard to feel that closeness – his promise is as certain as ever.

One of the great movies of all time was the 1959 epic Ben Hur. One of the movie’s most riveting scenes where Charlton Heston (Ben Hur) defeated his enemy in a very realistic chariot race. The scene required 5 weeks of filming, 15,000 extras, and 18 chariots.

To add to the authenticity Charlton Heston actually learned to drive the chariots he’d be using in the race. But after weeks of practice, Heston was worried about the shoot. He confided in the stunt coordinator: “I can drive the chariot, but I’m not sure I can win.”

The stunt man smiled and replied: “Chuck, you just make sure you stay in the chariot, and I’ll make sure you win the race.”

You see, Heston had made the mistake of thinking that he actually had to win the race by his own power and skill.

He had forgotten that the outcome had already been decided. It was in the script. He couldn’t lose!

And really that’s what God is trying to get us to see in Isaiah 40. With God on our side, we can’t lose. The script has already been written –We might grow weary, tired, disheartened and exhausted. We might even be tempted to give up. God will not give up.

We have a God who never gets tired of caring for us and loving us. Even when we think that God isn’t close to us and in fact, find it hard to feel that closeness – God’s promise is as certain as ever.

Let's read it together.

“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.”