

# Everlasting God

## Isaiah 40:21-31

This scripture and our message today is about whether the Everlasting God, the creator of the universe, is concerned about you and me and the challenges we face day by day.

When some of us read this passage we see Eric Liddell, that famous Olympic runner in the movie *Chariots of Fire*, standing in the pulpit of that Paris church reading these words with grace and beauty, his soft, gentle Scottish brogue filling the sanctuary. Some also hear hints of that popular contemporary song "On Eagle's Wings," lilting in the background with Michael Joncas' haunting refrain: "And He will raise you up on eagle's wings."

Three things come to mind as we look at this text: (1) we are theological amnesiacs; (2) the psalmist reminds us that God really is in charge; and (3) only when we feel weak and helpless, whether young or old, are we vulnerable enough to experience the power and grace of a God who "raises us up on eagle's wings." So, our text is about us, about God and what God does with us when all we seem to be is down.

First of all, we are amnesiacs. Notice how selective our memory is. We remember what we want to. If we are constantly self-critical, we remember only the awful things we have done in our lives. If we think we are perfect, we remember only the good things.

Therefore, theological amnesia is the kind of problem that causes us to fall apart every time crisis comes. It is what happens when you hear the

dreaded "cancer," "heart disease" or "dementia" word or the doctor tells you they found a spot on your lung, or a tumor in the brain or colon. Some of us whine. Others of us worry in desperate silence. **William J. Carl III**

The first hearers of this poem were those in exile in Babylon. For the exiles, captivity in Babylon was a painful reality (in varying degrees). They were forced from their homes, scattered as the temple was laid to waste, and became refugees from the very land that held promise. They are a people who longed for Jerusalem and wept by the rivers of Babylon (Ps. 137:1); they are the faint and powerless and even observe their youths grow weary and fall exhausted (Isa. 40:29-30). From this condition, each Israelite concludes, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God" (v. 27). They could have concluded that the gods of Babylon were stronger than their God or that God really does not exist at all. But their conclusion is that they are simply "disregarded" by the One who sits above the circle of the earth. **David Forney**

Like the returning exiles, we wonder whether God hasn't gone off and left us altogether. The real problem is that we have forgotten who we are. There is a kind of theological identity crisis in the church today. We do not know who we are as Christians anymore. We do not remember what we believe or why we believe it. No wonder we feel lost and alone. No wonder we have no idea how to talk with the world about our faith.

Theological amnesia is especially troubling when life goes well. How easily we forget God when everything is on track in our lives! We forget that God loves us and wants the best for us. We forget to praise and thank God for the blessings we receive every day. This was Israel's constant problem. No wonder the Deuteronomist and the prophets kept reminding Israel who God was and is.

What happens when we forget the everlasting God who is Creator and Sustainer, Redeemer and Friend? The moment we confront trouble we collapse with anxiety and stress. Too many people are "stressed out" these days because of their lack of trust in God. Think of Elijah hiding in a cave, scared to death of Jezebel in 1 Kings 19. The word of the Lord comes to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" In other words, "Why are you so stressed out? Get up and get moving again! Have you forgotten what I have done for you throughout your life? Have you forgotten that I was with you when you came face to face with the Baal prophets? Why do you keep forgetting me?"

In many ways, this Isaiah text represents the same kind of theological slap in the face that reminds us how God really does reign over all nature and history, the one "who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing" (v. 23). Isaiah is trying to cure the world's amnesia. God has not forgotten you. Why are you forgetting God? We worry because we don't trust God. Trust God more and you will cure your worry problems.

Let me warn you – although God is everlasting and powerful, we know of wars, genocide, poverty and abuse. These are not God's will, but the sinfulness of people who are selfish and greedy.

We come to know how God works in the world through years of living with God and God's people. Years of exploring, seeking, reflecting, and acting with God. Over time, through Bible study, worship, practices of faith like hospitality and forgiveness, stewardship and service, we come to a place of knowing God's ways, even if we cannot sufficiently put words to it.

**Verity A. Jones** In Isaiah's contemplation of God in relation to humanity, we see a tapestry of good news that shows the way the exhausted, faint,

powerless, and weary renew their strength, mount up with wings like eagles, run without growing weary, walk without fainting (v. 31). **David Forney**

There is a woman in Tennessee who understands. Her name is Margaret Stevenson. She is in her nineties. She used to hike ten or fifteen miles every day. She is a legend in the Smokies. It was always a joy to hike with Margaret, because she knew every turn and every trail and every plant and tree by its Latin and colloquial name. Bill's first trip up Mt. LeConte was her seventy-fifth, and his second was her hundred twenty-fifth. Bill's third was her five-hundredth trip. When she finally stopped hiking, she had climbed Mt. LeConte more than 700 times. Her husband rarely went, even before he got cancer. Once when she and Bill were hiking together, they came upon what Margaret described as the most unrelenting two-mile ridge in the whole area—two miles up with no break, and this after a hard six miles on a very hot day. Bill liked to hike in spurts, so he said, "See you later, Margaret," and took off in his usual fashion and got way ahead of her. At some point, Bill found himself lying flat on his back in half delirium. A blurred Margaret passed at her steady pace. He heard the click-click of her cane and with no pity at all in her voice, "One more mile to go, Bill. I'll see you at the top!" And so she did, arriving well ahead of him without stopping once.

Not long after that, her husband finally died of cancer, but because of her daily walk with God their last few hours were spent not in sadness or remorse, but in joy and celebration. For when Margaret says, "I'll see you at the top!" she means it, for her face is fixed on Christ, her step is steady and sure, and she knows the meaning of Isaiah's words:

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 as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. **William J. Carl III**

Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year B,  
Volume 1: Advent through Transfiguration.