

**Isaiah 40:27-31 + Haven't You Heard? + Series: We Are His Witnesses**  
**Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY**  
**5th Sunday after the Epiphany + 4 February 2018**

A young man dreads the next morning. He has a big exam, but didn't get a chance to study for it until late that night. The test will have a big impact on his grade for the semester, so he has to do well. He studies into the wee hours of the morning until finally he sets an alarm and goes to bed.

A couple hours later it goes off in the dark. He stumbles out of bed and gets himself ready for the inevitable. He calls out a quick goodbye to his parents as he heads out the door. It's snowing outside, but all he can think about as he trudges to the bus stop is that dreaded exam in first hour. Today is going to be the worst day ever! At the bus stop the snow keeps falling, but he doesn't notice. No one else shows up, not even the bus, but the young man is lost in his thoughts. After a few minutes, the young man texts one of his friends, "Where r u?" "Haven't u heard? It's a snow day. Test tomorrow!"

It's called tunnel vision—those moments when you get so zeroed in on whatever is right in front of you that you fail to notice what actually happens when it happens. You get focused on a big test or doctor's visit or work assignment or simply whatever dreaded inevitable looms before you. You know what I'm talking about—that thing, that event, that activity, that task, that puts a pit in your stomach and robs you of restful sleep. You get so zeroed in that only a simple question can pull you out of it—"Haven't you heard...?" "Haven't you heard? It's a snow day!" "Haven't you heard? They made our job much easier." "Haven't you heard? You don't have to complete the full assignment." "Haven't you heard? The doctor said you're fine!"

The Jews of Isaiah's time were struggling with tunnel vision. Their cousins to the north—the former Kingdom of Israel—had been swept away by the brutal Assyrians. Cities leveled. Farms and fields burned. Homes destroyed. Everyone from the greatest to the least scattered to the four winds never to return. The Assyrians had even ravaged their way through the Kingdom of Judah right up to the gates of the holy city of Jerusalem. If not for the Lord's miraculous intervention wiping out the Assyrian army in a single night, Jerusalem and Judah would've been lost too. Even so, there were prophecies of another eastern empire—the Babylonians from modern-day Iraq, who would eventually wipe out Jerusalem and Judah for years of wickedness, sending the Jews into far-off exile for 70 years.

Things didn't look good for God's people. You can understand why their hearts ached, why tears streamed down their cheeks. They grieved for the past when the Lord had richly blessed Israel. They dreaded the future when God's judgment would come to them as it had for their northern cousins. They lamented the present because the Lord of grace had abandoned them or so it seemed. God had so richly blessed them in the past, but now he ignored them or so it seemed. His promises to bless them and be with them and even send a Savior to them seemed meaningless. So they complained. They saw nothing except the long, slow march towards destruction and death. Would anything wake them from their tunnel vision?

Into such over-focused tunnel vision, the Lord sent his prophet Isaiah. ***"Jacob, why do you say, and Israel, why do you assert: 'My way is hidden from the LORD, and my claim is ignored by my God?' Do you not know? Have you not heard?"*** "Israel, why are you complaining? Why do you think that the Lord of grace isn't paying attention to you? Why do you think the holy Judge over all is ignoring your case or disregarding your cause? Don't you know? Haven't you heard?" God's people looked up from their dreaded inevitable. "Don't know what? Haven't heard what?"

Israel, haven't you heard? Look at what the Lord reveals in his Word! ***"The LORD is the everlasting God..."*** For a people who only saw death and destruction in their future, for a people who couldn't see past the problems and troubles and hardships of the here and now, for a people who complained that God was hiding his love and care and attention, this woke them up.

Purely by grace, God had chosen them to be his people from whom the Savior of the world would come. Purely by grace, God had rescued their forefathers from slavery in Egypt and fed millions of their ancestors for forty years in the wilderness. Purely by grace, God had given them the Promised Land under Joshua and established a great kingdom under David and Solomon. God had rescued them from the hands of the Assyrians, would preserve their descendants in exile, and would provide that long-promised Savior. That Lord of free and faithful grace ***"is the everlasting God"*** who rules over all time and eternity. That God had guided, was guiding, and would guide all of history for their blessing.

Israel, haven't you heard? Look at what the Lord reveals in his Word! ***"The LORD is...the Creator of the whole earth."*** God's people were in need. They had lost nearly everything! They had to pick up the pieces left behind by the Assyrians. One day their descendants would be torn away from that land only to start returning nearly a century later. How would they survive? The Lord of grace is ***"the Creator of the whole earth,"*** providing for them as he had in the past.

Israel, haven't you heard? Look at what the Lord reveals in his Word! ***"The LORD...never becomes faint or weary; there is no limit to his understanding. He gives strength to the faint and strengthens the powerless."*** Was God tired of dealing with the Israelites? They had rejected him and chased after other gods. Time and again they had been faithless to their faithful God, but when they faced hardship, they cried out to the Lord. If he didn't answer right away, they claimed he was ignoring them, but was he?

Isaiah's response surely put such thoughts to rest. The Lord of grace never gets tired and never gets tired of his people. We would've abandoned such faithless people long ago, but the Lord of grace kept watching over them, helping them, and blessing them. Why would God do that? Why not give up on those faithless people? The Lord of free and faithful love selflessly saves. His gracious wisdom no search could ever fully understand. His love ***gives strength to the faint and strengthens the powerless.***

Rather than leave them wallowing in the depths of despair, hyper-focused on the dreaded inevitable and slowly marching towards death and destruction, what would the Lord do for his people? Israel, haven't you heard. Look at what the Lord reveals in his Word! ***"Youths may become faint and weary, and young men stumble and fall, but those who trust in the LORD will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not become weary, they will walk and not faint."***

Kids are so full of energy. They bounce all over the place throughout the day, but even they crash. Young men and women thrive at the peak of their physical and mental abilities, but they too stumble and fall. If they can, then what about everyone else? Is the Lord promising to give his people an energy boost greater than any energy drink you can find at the store? Not quite.

For those who hope, who trust in the Lord of grace, he pulls them up from the depths of despair. He picks them up from the dust and renews their strength, not so they can fly like eagles, but to serve and follow him freely. From the youngest child to the oldest adult, the Lord of grace renews his people through his Word. He refreshes them through his Supper that they may walk and run in his ways. God's people find their hope and trust in the Lord of grace.

Do you ever find yourself getting caught up in tunnel vision? You struggle with an illness or a health issue and you wonder if it will ever end. A loved one's health deteriorates and things don't seem to be getting any better. A situation in your family seems to have no solution. The bills keep increasing and you wonder how you'll pay them if anything else breaks down. Maybe your company or business or congregation is struggling and you don't know how to turn things around. Maybe it's a series of all kinds of smaller issues that threaten to overwhelm you. In unguarded moments, you might even think that your life is circling a drain. Is God listening? Is the Lord even aware of your struggles? Where is God when life hurts, when the future fills you with dread?

Into our over-focused tunnel vision, the Lord sends his prophet. "Don't you know? Haven't you heard? Look at what the Lord reveals in his Word! ***"The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the whole earth. He never becomes faint or weary; there is no limit to his understanding. He gives strength to the faint and strengthens the powerless."***

So you think the Lord isn't there for you, that he turns his back on you or even abandons you? Haven't you heard? ***The LORD is the everlasting God!*** He's been with you the entire time—just as he promised. Are you worried about how you're going to pay the bills, feed the family, or get work? Haven't you heard? ***The LORD is...the Creator of the whole earth,*** who has provided for you every step of the way, even providing a Savior for your sin.

Do you think he should get tired of you, that he should walk away from you? Haven't you heard? ***He never becomes faint or weary...*** In fact, because of your guilt, your sin, your troubles and hardships, he sent his one and only Son to take that guilt off your shoulders. He sent Jesus to cleanse your guilty heart and wash your filthy hands. He sent Christ to insure that you will continue walking with him from here to eternity.

You see, ***there is no limit to his understanding.*** There is no reaching the limits of his gracious love and mercy for you! In fact, when you're weary and worn out with life, he gives you strength and power from his gracious fullness. Do you feel powerless? Christ renews your strength! Christ pulls you up with his gracious power from

the depths of despair. Christ picks you up from the dust that you may walk, and not just walk, but run in his ways even when it seems like life is only getting worse. Haven't you heard? Jesus is the everlasting God. Jesus is the Creator of the world. Jesus never gets tired of you, and you can't possibly fathom the depths of his love. Jesus strengthens your weary heart because Jesus is the Lord of grace.

That, my friends, is the message that renews our strength and the message that we share with our loved ones who are struggling with health problems or financial burdens or job loss or family issues or grief or pain or anxiety. We share God's Word, with all its promises, and our everlasting God renews their strength as he renews ours.

As he used Isaiah, he sends us into their hyper-focused tunnel vision with a simple question. "Haven't you heard? Jesus is here for you. He won't leave you! He won't get tired of what's going on in your life like you do. In fact, he'll renew your strength. He'll lift you up and tell you, 'I'm here. I'm watching over you. I'm not going away. Come and find your rest, your strength, your peace in me!'" And through such a message, Jesus reaches down and pulls them up and renews their strength. What a message of renewal! What a message of strength! Lord of grace, enable us to share that message with many others! Amen.