

“Renew with Good News”

Isaiah 40:21-31, Psalm 36:10, Matthew 6:30-34

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Prayer for Understanding Eternal Spirit, you flow through the ages from the pages of Scripture, transforming hearts, moving those who hear to new acts of love, courage, and service. Bless our hearts and minds in the reading of the Word, so that we might know your presence and power more fully. We pray in the name of the Living Word. Amen.

Many years ago, *The Saturday Evening Post* ran a cartoon showing a man about to be rescued after he had spent a long time shipwrecked on a tiny, deserted island. The sailor in charge of the rescue team stepped onto the beach and handed the man a stack of newspapers. “Compliments of the Captain,” the sailor said. “He would like you to glance at the headlines to see if you would still like to be rescued!”

God assures us through the prophet Isaiah that no matter how bad the news, God is renewing each of us and the cosmos. Today’s scripture is a vision of hope and renewal for demoralized and weary people. God gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. The LORD shall renew your strength, you shall mount up with wings like eagles, you shall run and not be weary, you shall walk and not faint.

Are you tired, weary, fatigued from bad news? Leslie-Jean Thornton, a journalism professor, said that even faculty members who by necessity were steeped in news need breaks from the news. “As journalism professors, there is a need and a desire to stay on top of things — so much so that it becomes somewhat addictive for some of us. It is hard to step away, even for a few hours, but yet the constant wash of uncertainties is emotionally draining and physically harmful — teeth damaged from being clenched in anger or frustration, skyrocketing blood pressure, heart palpitations.” Leslie-Jean added, “I joke that we need trauma care, but I’m not really joking at all.”

Most of us are constantly bombarded with news leaving little time to process. Most are buried with information that is continuous and controversial. The news tends to include a lot of conflicting information that leaves us confused and stressed, often with no tangible way to respond other than to offer an opinion. Neil Postman, in his 1985 book *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, called this the “loop of impotence”. “The news elicits from you a variety of opinions about which you can do nothing except to offer them as more news, about which you can do nothing.” Neil, writing in the days before the internet, was already pointing to the problem of “news fatigue” or a general malaise that leaves us feeling depressed, powerless, and distrustful of news sources that often seem superficial, sensationalist, inaccurate, or hopelessly biased. The result is that the more news we consume the more anxiety we feel or, on the flip side, the more desensitized we become to the news itself.

One remedy is to simply turn off the news. At least for certain times of the day and occasionally for an entire week. Another remedy is to focus on good news. Dan Gillmor, a professor of media literacy, believes the remedy is the “slow news movement,” named after the slow food movement, which maintains it is better for consumers’ health to cook and eat more slowly.

The prophet Isaiah’s remedy is to step back and remember the big picture. Our God of love created a good cosmos that will expand with love, joy, peace, and beauty for eternity. Harmful, hurtful, fearful actions God will heal everyone until all that is not good will wither and blow away into nothingness. God is with you. God knows your troubles. God will forgive, heal, redeem, renew, resurrect, and glorify you and the cosmos. You will be full of abundant life, vigor, soaring like eagles.

Isaiah 40:21-31 NRSV 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? It is God 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; who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when God blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? God who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because God is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing. 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”? 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. God gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. 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 like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah urges us to put our current situation and news within the context of an eternal perspective. The bad and good stuff happening now has happened before and will happen again. Rather than fret or foment yet another opinion, Isaiah calls us to remember that the news that really matters is the gospel, the good news, that the God who created the world in which all this news happens is still at work and will ultimately set everything right.

Isaiah wrote to a people confronted with the reality of exile — people isolated and distanced far from home in circumstances they did not choose. God announces through Isaiah that a return from exile is on the horizon: a new exodus in which God's people would be set free and restored. God nourishes and cares for them like a shepherd.

The news that we should keep reminding ourselves and others is God is lovingly caring for everyone, God is renewing all of us. It is good news that puts all other news into perspective. As one worries over news, about the forces of nature threatening to overwhelm us, God reminds us that God is the Creator who “has measured the waters in the hollow of God's hand”. While the daily news talks about the discord between nations, God reminds us, God's beloved children, that “the nations are like a drop from a bucket and are accounted as dust on the scales”. Hate, hurt, and fear will become nothing by God's renewing love. While the news wants us to be constantly concerned about our material safety and wealth, God reminds us to be careful what we worship and to be mindful of the things over which we fret. These things become “idols”, but they cannot be compared to the surpassing glory of the God who created all things. A critical question to ask yourself: Is the news inspiring me to lovingly serve or am I becoming a slave to the news imprisoned with fear and worry?

The glory of God and God's gracious, renewing care provides us with the best news we could possibly hear. “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?” The natural and human-caused calamities that dominate the news cycle God encourages us to put them into perspective by taking the long view.

If we do not regularly remind ourselves, and each other, of the good news of God then it is easy to get caught up in the news of the day, begin to despair, or be drawn into fear, hate, and idolatry. Bad news or awful circumstances may fatigue us into feeling that we are alone, that God is unaware of our plight, that God is not renewing us. “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth” The repetition accentuates the point that the God who created the cosmos allows nothing to escape God's notice and will allow nothing to defeat God's love for God's good creation. No matter how bad the news, God's love will ultimately prevail renewing all. God does not suffer from “news fatigue.” As Isaiah puts it, “God does not faint or grow weary; God's understanding is unsearchable.” Not only does God know the long view of God's redeeming love in history. God offers power and strength to those who feel the fatigue of bad news in the present. Human beings tend to busy themselves trying to either come up with solutions to every problem or offering their opinions to those who “should” be doing something to fix them.

The pandemic has taught us, there are limits to human knowledge and ability. If we trust only in ourselves, we are bound to experience the fatigue of despair when we fail or reach the end of our ability. The wonder, energy and joy of youth can lead to disappointment and exhaustion when the reality sets in that we cannot “fix” the news no matter how hard we try. Rather than fret, fixate, or forego the news, Isaiah invites us to deal with our fatigue in light of the larger reality the Creator God has once again declared to all people. Instead of “waiting” on the news by constantly refreshing our screens or scrolling through a social media feed, Isaiah instead invites us to “wait for the Lord”. That “waiting” does not mean we simply sit around and do nothing, allowing the news to continue to wash over us. To “wait” means to look to God to provide us with perspective, hope, and purpose through prayer and through being immersed in God's Word. The psalmist sings, **Psalm 46:10 “Be still and know God.”** Jesus taught, **Matthew 6:33 “Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and God will give you everything you need.”** Framing the news with a daily discipline of time spent in the presence of God will enable us to pick up a different pace of life. Do you grab your phone to check the news first thing in the morning? That is a recipe for starting the day with anxiety, rather than mounting up for the day “with wings like eagles”. Instead, try beginning the day with Scripture and prayer before you even touch that phone, TV, or newspaper. Allow God's Word to nourish you and strengthen you for the day ahead, to prepare you to run the gauntlet of the day without growing weary or discouraged, and to walk steadily forward without fainting under a load of bad news. The cure for news fatigue, in other words, is to begin with the good news first! C.S. Lewis wrote, “It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other

larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in. And so on, all day. Standing back from all your natural fussings and frettings; coming in out of the wind.”

Jesus said, **Matthew 6:30-34** “God will attend to you, take pride in you, do God’s best for you? What I am trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God’s giving. People who do not know God and the way God works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how God works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Do not worry about missing out. You will find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and do not get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.”

Jesus modeled his teachings. **Mark 1:35-38** “Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray. Later Simon and the others went out to find Jesus. When they found Jesus, they said, “Everyone is looking for you.” But Jesus replied, “We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too. That is why I came.”

Disciples of Jesus preach the good news. Each of us is called to tell ourselves, and others the good news of God’s redeeming love.

The news we tell ourselves is of utmost importance. Last week, I watched *Penguin Bloom* a movie based on the true story of the Bloom family. They were a loving, joyful family who played in the water and savored hiking adventures. The active mom, who loved surfing, became paralyzed from a fall from a balcony. Her paralysis changed the story she told herself. She kept dreaming that she was drowning. She told herself she was useless, unlovable, and a burden as a spouse and parent. Her son who urged his mom to see the view from the balcony changed the story about himself. He told himself that he was to blame for his mom’s paralysis and wished that he were the one who fell instead. It was an awful accident. Certainly, after the paralysis life would be harder regardless of the story they told themselves. Unfortunately, the negative story, they kept repeating, made them all miserable. Their anger, frustration, and fighting grew. They found an injured bird, Penguin, and began nursing it back to health. Penguin was the catalyst that shifted their stories. The family assured the son that he was not to blame for the accident. They found new ways to enjoy life. The mom started kayaking which caused her drowning dreams to end. She smiled again. They carried the mom on her favorite hike. Their stories become more and more positive, hopeful, and loving. Each of them experienced renewal, vigor, wonder, and love. This dramatic shift was caused by the stories they told themselves and each other.

Do you sometimes languish in “ifs”? How often in life is a relationship damaged because we assume, telling ourselves that someone did something hurtful to us? Often a person’s actions and words are not meant to hurt, rather are symptoms of the pain they are experiencing. How much of a person’s accomplishment are due to talent and how much is due to the story they tell themselves?

The ultimate, eternal story is we have been created by our loving God, who gave us a good creation, who is healing every hurt, who is preserving every joy, who will delight in being in loving relationship with us for eternity. God is the source of life. Place the news, the reality of your situation and the stories you tell yourself all in the context of God’s eternal, resurrecting love for you. Often when one reminds themselves of God’s love they are renewed, able to keep trying, to forgive, to serve, to love, to wonder, to rejoice. God is saying to you. I am the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. I am giving you power and strength. I promise to renew you. You will run and not be weary. You will walk and not faint. You will soar like an eagle. Amen