



Faith Bible Study Guide
For the Week of February 4, 2024
5th Sunday After Epiphany - "Don't You Know? Haven't You Heard?"

Be still [2 Minutes]: As you hear these Centering Words, let us greet each other, greet the Holy Spirit, and begin with 1 minute of silence, breathing in the breath of God and allow the group to open themselves to the Holy Spirit today:

CENTERING WORDS: Those who trust God will rise up with wings like eagles.

OPENING PRAYER: Everlasting God, you stretch the sky over our heads like a canopy filled with twinkling lights. Scarcely do the stems of our lives take root before the wind carries us away like stubble. Yet you care for us – healing the brokenhearted, gathering the outcast, lifting the downtrodden, while casting the wicked to the ground. Renew our strength this day, O God, that we may mount up with wings like eagles. Amen.

Be the Word: Scripture Lesson: Isaiah 40:21-31

Don't you know? Haven't you heard?

Wasn't it announced to you from the beginning?

Haven't you understood since the earth was founded?

22 God inhabits the earth's horizon—
its inhabitants are like locusts—
stretches out the skies like a curtain
and spreads it out like a tent for dwelling.

23 God makes dignitaries useless
and the earth's judges into nothing.

24 Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,
scarcely is their shoot rooted in the earth
when God breathes on them, and they dry
up;
the windstorm carries them off like straw.

25 So to whom will you compare me,
and who is my equal? says the holy one.

Power for the weary

26 Look up at the sky and consider:
Who created these?

The one who brings out their attendants
one by one,

L: The Word of God for all people

P: Thanks be to God

summoning each of them by name.
Because of God's great strength
and mighty power, not one is missing.

27 Why do you say, Jacob,
and declare, Israel,
"My way is hidden from the LORD,
my God ignores my predicament"?

28 Don't you know? Haven't you heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the creator of the ends of the earth.
He doesn't grow tired or weary.
His understanding is beyond human reach,

29 giving power to the tired
and reviving the exhausted.

30 Youths will become tired and weary,
young men will certainly stumble;

31 but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength;
they will fly up on wings like eagles;
they will run and not be tired;
they will walk and not be weary.

Be present: [Being mindful of others and sharing time]

1. Take a deep breath. How is it with your soul?
2. Who are your heroes? Your role models or mentors? Who in your life has bolstered you up?
3. Have you ever been someone's "wind beneath their wings"?

Be rooted: [Bible Study]

<https://youtu.be/jorJh8DTMVM?si=eM0l67nIOjStl> Lm "Wind Beneath My Wings" - Bette Middler

The chapters following Isaiah 40 address a tired and weary people who likely had some trouble imagining a new future.

At the beginning of Isaiah 40, the call went out to comfort the people who have been exiled from their homeland and for a desert highway to be built for their return. Verses 21-31 proclaim God's power that will

make this vision a reality. Isaiah 40:21-31 both disputes any claim to divine power apart from the LORD and confesses the character of the LORD. Both are expressed through the lens of God's creative abilities. Verses 21-31 are part of a longer section beginning in verse 18. The passage may be broken into four sections, identified by repeated lines:

18-20: *To whom will you liken God?*

21-24: Have you not known? Have you not heard?

25-27: *To whom will you liken me?*

28-31: Have you not known? Have you not heard?

1. Don't you know? Haven't you heard? Which Scripture verse stands out to you or speaks to you the most?
2. Don't you know? Haven't you heard? How would you divide today's scriptures? Which verses belong to which:
 - a. The Lord, the Creator of all
 - b. The Lord knows you
 - c. The Lord recreates and strengthens
3. Have you ever felt downtrodden, downcast, discouraged, hopeless, or from your perspective, all seems lost, with no evidence that God is in control? Where is God in those moments?

What is Isaiah trying to say to us?

When Jesus Christ fulfills all things, it includes these promises of God. If you are tired, then God strengthens you, sometimes in surprising ways, sometimes unseen. Those who wait with hope in the Lord—they will be renewed. May this comfort, encourage, and strengthen as we live in this time.

Be transformed: [Call to action]

<https://youtu.be/y22IG4Z49Lo?si=tvkIVp012VKY0jLn> "On Eagles Wings"

In 1976, while still in his 20s, Father Michael Joncas wrote "On Eagle's Wings" for a friend who had lost his father. He sang the song at the wake, then again, at the family's request, the next day at the funeral. "I never knew 'On Eagle's Wings' was going to be something that touched people," Joncas says.

1. Think about how God lifts you up on Eagle's Wings. How does it feel knowing that God always surrounds you and carries you in times of trouble, difficult moments, challenging times, and hardships? What does that kind of support look like in the world we live in today?
2. Where/when can we be Eagle's Wings for others? As individuals—person to person. As church people—as people of Faith in the world. As a community—neighbor to neighbor and even to the stranger.

Prayers & Concerns

Celebrations...

Sally & Ken's 54th Anniversary (1/31/24)

Prayers for healing and wholeness...

Claretta Foster

Jack Hamada

The Sasaki Family; Jordan Sasaki, Sally, Ken, & Jason

Jerry Osaka

Victoria Dela Torre

Diane & Destiny Ueda-Banda

Audrey Goto

Tak and Irene Ryono

Ralph Ichikawa's brother, Jim (Tio)

Kurt Kuniyoshi (stage 4 colon cancer)

Alice Kajiya

Faye Toma

Virginia Flood

Jason's friend, Kaitlyn Sabedra

Scarlett Bone

Glenn & Millie Shimizu

Faith Tanaka

Sam Kobayashi

Prayers for Grieving Families...

Greg Kubo (passed away on 2/3/24)

Henry Uepi Isama'u (passed on 1/24/24)

Kenneth Kanja (passed on 1/25/24)

Dave Cook (passed; service 2/3/24; burial 2/4/24)

Kirk Sinn passed on 12/4/23

Rev. Kim Scott (brother passed)

Akiko Kashiwagi (passed 1/7/24; service 3/23/24)

Tom Tokishi (service on 1/20/24)

Helen Hayakawa passed, 11/27/23 (service 2/23/24)

Kim's niece of a friend, Asha (passed)

Rev. Allison's godfather's family in the passing of Uncle Vincent "Buffalo" Randall and her godmother's brother, Uncle Jack Brown.

Orion (Susan's niece), her father Bernard passed away

Minister Ainise's cousin, James Jethro passed away

Rose Honda (West LA)

For our hurting world...

Japan Earthquake

People of the Holy Land

Families rebuilding after natural disasters

Election year

Covid (and for those who are sick, ailing)

And Know that He is God: Commission & Benediction (based on 1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Isaiah 40:21-31)

Go now, and trust in God's mercy for your strength.
Proclaim the good news wherever God calls you,
and do not set yourselves apart from others,
but be all things to all people for the sake of the gospel.

And may God give you the strength and freedom of an eagle.
May Christ be the bread that nourishes and renews you.
And may the Holy Spirit be the rising wind beneath your wings.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Cheat sheet 1a.b.c.:

The LORD, the Creator of all

Verses 21-24 question how it is that the people do not recognize God's creative power and then give examples of this power that would be difficult to miss. The first image in verse 22 is of a dome over the earth, with God sitting atop it. Meanwhile, below, the much tinier, much less powerful inhabitants go about their business, like insects in a terrarium. The dome, as the Israelites would have imagined it, acted as a solid boundary to protect the earth from the waters of chaos (Genesis 1:6-8). Windows would open to let in water in the form of rain and then close when the rains were complete. What kind of creator is this? One who sets life-giving boundaries. One who keeps the waters of chaos at bay.

The second image in verse 22 is of the LORD stretching out the heavens like a tent. The metaphor is common in the Hebrew Bible, as the action of stretching out animal skins or goat's hair cloth over and around poles to create a tent would have been familiar. Whether one dwells in a tent of stretched skins or another type of habitation, the image of God preparing a home resonates across the generations. What kind of creator is this? One who makes a home for God's creatures. One who provides and protects.

At first blush, the image in verse 23 of the LORD bringing "princes to naught" and making "the rulers of the earth like nothing" seems to have little to do with creation and to run counter to the above acts of provision and protection. In verse 23 the Hebrew word translated as "nothing" in the NRSV is the same word translated as "void" in Genesis 1:2 (*tohu*). One recalls that in Genesis it was into such a formless void that God spoke creation. God has power even over "nothingness."

As for the princes, a good and orderly ruling of the world has much to do with the created order in the Hebrew Bible. Whatever void occurs from the loss of these rulers, God will fill this void with something new. Creation is not a one-time act but ongoing, sustaining activity that includes fostering societies that operate in life-giving ways. When that ruling is neither good nor orderly, God just might blow as one blows chaff, making room for a new creation.

The LORD knows you

To whom will you compare me? In verses 18-20, just before the beginning of the pericope, the response to this question was negative: do not liken me to gods made with human hands. In verses 25-27, the dispute has more to do with the people of Israel accusing God of not seeing them, of passing them over (see NRSV "disregarded"; verse 27). Perhaps another God has their best interests at heart and will sustain them into the future? Once more creation imagery serves as a way to address the concern. Look to the heavens with their host, the moon and the stars. Are any of them missing? Have they floated away? No. God has named them and claimed them. In the same way, God has named and claimed Israel.

The LORD recreates and strengthens

Verses 28-31 look toward the future. Throughout this section of Isaiah, God's action of returning the Israelites—at least those who desired to go—to Jerusalem is understood as an act of creation. The same power used to make the heavens and the earth will be leveraged on behalf of the people to form them into a new creation. In verse 28, the statement that the Creator does not faint or grow weary suggests that there is more to come. God has not finished with Israel yet.

Part of this creative work will be renewing and strengthening the people as this work is accomplished. God may not be tired, but humans are. Imagining a new future, physical travel toward Jerusalem, and rebuilding a city still

largely destroyed are activities that require energy. Those trusting in the incomparable LORD, however, will have the energy to move forward into the new creation that the LORD has in store.

Those who returned to Jerusalem would find their share of struggle and disappointment. The promise of new creation was not a promise of life outside of the world as they knew it. Yet the creative power of their God opened for them a way where before there had been no way.

Weariness, of course, is not unique to the Israelites. Moving forward with joy into a newly created future that one cannot yet imagine may require strength beyond what humans hold within themselves. This word might be welcome among people struggling to imagine what their own future holds. The promise of God's continual creative work, with its mysterious yet life-giving power, continues to be a word of hope for God's tired and weary people.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fifth-sunday-after-epiphany-2/commentary-on-isaiah-4021-31-5>