

Reflections for Sunday, February 8, 2015
Glennon Heights Mennonite Church
Betsy Headrick McCrae

Scripture passage: Isaiah 40:21-31

What do you know? What have you heard?

Before I share a few thoughts with you this morning, I need to give you a heads-up. This is going to be an interactive morning; I'm going to ask you to share your thoughts as well. "Have you not known?" asks the author of Isaiah 40. "Have you not heard?" Well, what's our response? What do you know? What have you heard? Please be thinking about what you have come to know about God, what you have heard, and how you have seen God at work in your life or in the world around you.

The passage we read from Isaiah 40 is all about who God is – "The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth." – but this is not an introduction of something new for God's people. It is not proposing a different, unexpected way of thinking about God. Instead it is telling a foundational story, a well-known story, but perhaps one that has grown a little dusty on the shelf. This passage is meant to serve as a sort of energy drink, a strong cup of coffee, perhaps, for folks who have grown religiously dull and tired, folks who instead of keeping wonder, praise and joy at the forefront of their worship, have opted for ritual and judgment. They've become exhausted by life and faith and all its complications. This impassioned speech from Isaiah 40 reminds us that God is great beyond the pettiness of our everyday lives and even the limitations of this world. God exists in time before and after our brief existence. God holds the world together. However, at the same time, God notices us in our finitude. God cares for us and for our struggles. The purpose of this speech from Isaiah is to lift

up those who are lying face down in the muck and mire of everyday life, to increase the strength of those who feel too weak to move forward, to bolster and rejuvenate the flagging spirits of God's people. The passage ends with these beautiful words: "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." With God there is new life. There is always hope.

It is important for us to take stock of ourselves and our faith occasionally. If we don't, we can grow weary. We can get to the point where there is no real joy. What's it all about anyway? Weariness and exhaustion with our faith can be responsible for our inability to hear God and for our misunderstanding or lack of understanding of how God is actively at work. We need to stop occasionally to listen, see and know again. We need to share and to listen to our God stories, old and new, to place ourselves in them and to hold them close to our hearts, for they are precious and irreplaceable. The stories of our faith are re-orienting. They are life-giving. They give us hope and renewed joy.

So, what have I seen? What have I heard? Something that has given me deep joy and great encouragement recently has been the settling of my father's estate after his death in November. My parents never had much money. Their livelihood was a dirt farm in the Arkansas Valley in southeastern Colorado. They lived a very simple life. But it was also a life of deep and vibrant faith in God, a faith which undergirded and influenced everything they did, including how they handled their money. Always they were giving, supporting church institutions, local, national and international, even when there was not much to give. They did this out of love for God, out of their understanding

of God's call on their lives, and to participate in what they very clearly saw as God's work in the world.

When it came time to sell their farm in 1997, the dry and dusty land wasn't worth all that much but the water rights that accrued to the land had become quite valuable. They ended up getting a very good price for the farm and our old house. I've always thought of it as poetic justice. Mom and Dad bought their apartment at Casa del Sol retirement community in LaJunta and then put much of the remaining money from the sale into an annuity trust with Mennonite Foundation. When they did this they designated where that money would go when they were both gone. As long as they lived, they would receive income from the interest and the trust amount itself would grow.

Mom died in 2004. Dad lived another 10 years. After he died in November, I let the Mennonite Foundation know that he was gone. Several weeks later I received an accounting from them. It made my heart sing! I wished I could tell Mom and Dad. They would have been so pleased. Because of their willingness throughout their lives to put their money where their faith was, at the end they were able to give a total of \$120,000 in substantial hunks to eight organizations (mostly Mennonite) which were important to them, organizations they had lovingly and faithfully supported all their lives, organizations which are doing God's work in our region, our nation and around the world. For me and my sisters, this is such a fitting final tribute to our parents and to the concrete reality of God's work in their lives. I have been surprised by how encouraging this has been for my own faith. My trust in God's provision is increased. My heart is borne up on eagle's wings. My strength is renewed. I feel great joy. Praise be to God!

Now it's your turn. What do you know? What have you seen? What stories do you have to share about God at work in your life and in the world?

Thank you for this time of encouragement and hope. I'd like to end by singing those last beautiful words from Isaiah 40. Please sing with me if you know the words.

They that wait upon 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. Teach me, Lord, teach me, Lord, to wait.

Amen.