

An Everlasting God
Isaiah 40:21-31
February 7, 2021
First Presbyterian, Luling

I don't know if any of you have ever been involved in what is called a "ropes course." There are two basic types of ropes courses. Low ropes is the basic team-building activity, with several tasks the team will need to figure out on its own. For instance, in one element, there is a web, like a spider web, of rope strung vertically between two trees. The team's job is to get every person from one side of the web to the other. They can only use each hole in the web one time. So there is a lot of strategy as to whether it's smarter to send the biggest person first or the smallest person first, and which hole to use for which person, that kind of thing. Some take-charge type will generally dive through one hole without considering the ramifications, and the rest of the team has to deal with that person's impulsiveness. You see how this can be transferred to how they work together, as a team at their place of business. A good ropes course will always set aside time for debriefing—what have we learned, how can we apply what we've learned to our life together as a work team, or a youth group, or whatever.

A high ropes course is a different matter entirely. It's more of an individual challenge, but it helps to have your team members there cheering you on. High ropes are, well, high up off of the ground. There are various set ups, but one always seems to involve jumping off a high pole, like a telephone pole, and free falling until your harness on the rope catches you. Or sometimes you climb up a wall and jump back down.

I have only done a high ropes element once. And I hated it. I hated that free-falling thing where my stomach was still on top of the pole and the rest of me was below. I just really hated it. I know that otherwise sane people jump out of airplanes with only a parachute to catch them. I've met them—they lived to tell about it. But I just don't think I could ever do that. More power to them. I'd rather fly the plane, which is equally unlikely to happen.

That free fall feeling in my stomach is what I always think of when I read this Isaiah passage: "they shall mount up with wings like eagles." No thanks. I've seen eagles fly, and they sometimes just drop, sinking on an air current before they rise up again. This doesn't look freeing or appealing to me, just way too scary to be something I want to do.

I can't quite get that sinking feeling out of my mind. But of course, I've missed the point of the passage entirely. The passage isn't about me at all. It's about God.

At this point in Isaiah, the people had been exiled far away from their land for more than a generation. They were relatively comfortable where they were, but Isaiah was promising them that God would restore them and send them back to rebuild Jerusalem. But, understandably, they are afraid, sure that the evil they know is better than the evil they don't know, afraid of what the new rulers will do, afraid that they

themselves won't have the strength or the resources necessary to do what God has planned for them to do. They are weary, they are afraid that they will fall exhausted, without being able to accomplish anything. And so they would rather sit where they are, exiled from their homeland, but relatively safe and comfortable. They would rather sit wearily, they would rather not answer God's call.

Well, yes. We do understand that. We certainly understand being weary, not knowing how to get back to normal, not knowing how to move forward. Going back to rebuild a ruin seems to require way too much energy. Jumping off that pole requires way too much courage. Following Jesus requires way too much.

But, again. We miss the point. This passage is about God's promises to the people, not the way the people feel about them. This passage is about God's sovereignty, God's eternity. The chapter over and over again says, "Have you not known? Have you not heard?" and then describes the creating activity of God, the saving activity of God, the upholding activity of God, throughout the generations. It's like Isaiah is saying, "You know better than this. You know that it's not about you. You know that God is already there, already at work. You know this. You've heard this all your lives. Remember?"

And when we, like the Israelites, think that God has forgotten us, that God doesn't care about us, that God is asking too much of us, that we are insignificant to God, Isaiah reminds us again: "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the end of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths 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."

Our strength, our stamina, our courage rest not on ourselves alone, but rest on the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. When our strength wanes, God gives power. When our stamina is beyond our grasp, God gives us what we need to keep on. When our courage does not appear, God gives us the push in the right direction, to jump off that pole and be lifted up on eagles' wings.

In an everlasting God, we place our trust and renew our strength.