

Fifth Sunday After Epiphany
February 5, 2012
Ordinary Life Rhythms: Dancing
Isaiah 40:21-31; Gospel: Mark 1:29-39

We often get tired in doing good

Be it with the Children's Ministry at First Baptist Church; PADS Homeless Shelter, Sunday School teaching, serving on ministry teams, Ten Thousand Gardens.

But there is more good we do than mere ministries related to the church
– we teach, we provide health care, we research, we farm, we administrate, we advocate, we service customers
– doing good involves all what we do as we do what we do in the service of Jesus

– so where or from whom do we draw our strength?

Isaiah 40 encourages us to find our strength for what we do in the everyday rhythms of our lives, **in the Lord,**

Because as v. 28 declares,
“The Lord will not grow tired or weary.”

And as the One who does not grow weary, “God gives strength to the weary, increases the power of the weak” (v 29).

Even those who have boundless energy – our children, our youth – even they will grow weary – yet, “those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint.” (v31).

“Those who hope in the Lord . . .”

How is this to be part of the rhythm of our ordinary everyday lives? **This hoping in the Lord.**

In our Mark text, this reaching out for hope in the midst of the struggles and challenges of our daily living is caught up in the exclamation of the disciples to Jesus, “Everyone is looking for you!”

Everyone is looking for Jesus because in him they have found hope again.

They have found hope again to lift them out of despair, illness, disease;

In Jesus they have found a renewed hope for being healed, for being set free from all that which oppresses them, In Jesus, they have a renewed hope for living again – and so “everyone is looking for you!”

Do we also look for Jesus, because we are in need of renewed hope?

Renewed hope for strength to live, strength to walk, strength to run, strength to soar.
Renewed hope that gives strength for us to find a new rhythm for our lives – to dance again as we have never danced before.

What is this hope that enables us to dance, rather than trudge through life?

In Isaiah, the text literally expresses: “those waiting on Yahweh.”

The word translated “hope” can either mean “wait” or “hope.”

Here the ideas overlap: “waiting hope” or “hopeful waiting.”

The image that is formed in my mind as I reflect on this overlap is one that involves **listening for and finding the right beat before one gets on the dance floor to dance.**

It is letting the beat of your heart get in rhythm with the beat of the rhythm.

However, there are some, who, once the music starts, just get right out there and start dancing, but it becomes apparent they don’t have the rhythm,

And so their dancing, their movements are not in harmony with the rhythm of the music.

Yet, those who take a minute or two to catch the rhythm of, what may be a new song, begin to feel the rhythm, the beat, the flow of the music, and then they can begin to enter in.

Jumping into dance, without really catching hold of the rhythm, can quickly bring about weariness and cause stumbling,

But, those who wait to catch the rhythm, begin tapping out the rhythm with their toes, and the result is that they are refreshed even in the midst of engaging in dance.

I remember a time when I found such a rhythm in jogging in college – believe or not I used to be a fair runner. One night I just started out running around the perimeter of the campus. I ran for almost an hour, almost 9 miles. It seemed I could just keep on going – it seemed it required little – I was in a groove, in a rhythm, and the only reason I finally stopped was for a bathroom break.

I was dancing.

Waiting on God,

Waiting on Yahweh,

Is to give our eyes to see, to give our ears to hear, for our hearts to sense the ways of God, the moving of God, the beat or rhythm of God in the world

And so,

As we wait to catch the beat, the rhythm, our feet begin to move, our toes begin to tap, and we are set free to dance, not only in the rhythm of God, but with God in what God is doing in the world.

When we get in the groove of God – we find ourselves being strengthened because we were created as human beings to be in relationship with God, to dance with God, to live our lives in the groove, the beat, the rhythm of God.

We celebrate such rhythms in our time of worship – in our gathering together.

Communion is one of those celebrations of our participating in the rhythm of God in our lives.

Communion is inherently a time in which we practice waiting on the Lord, getting into the rhythms of God

We are engaged in actions that guide us in waiting in sensing the cadence, the rhythm of God.

Eugene Peterson, as does Walter Brueggemann, relates a four-fold rhythm that takes place in communion.

But not just in communion – also in the daily rhythms of breaking bread.

For in the Gospels we see Jesus displaying the rhythm of God whenever he is with people at Table, when he feeds the five thousand, and the four thousand

The meal the core practice of giving and receiving life – displays the rhythm of God that **gives us strength to be, to do good, as we learn to wait on the rhythms of God in our eating together.**

Peterson describes this four-fold rhythm as: **Taking, blessing, breaking, and giving.** (cf. *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*, pp. 207-212)

Taking:

“Jesus takes what we bring him.

Implicit in his taking is our offering.

We offer what we have from the world of creation” – e.g. five loaves and two fishes; we offer not only what we eat, we also offer ourselves.

Blessing:

“What we offer to Jesus, Jesus offers to God with thanksgiving.

He doesn't examine it for flaws, doesn't evaluate or appraise it, criticize or reject our offering

- "two fish?

– is that all you could come up with?"

Is this all who you have, all you are?

No, Jesus receives what we offer him and he gives thanks to God

Breaking:

“Our gifts don't remain what we bring.

All too often we come to the Table with our best manners and a smug pose of impenetrable self-sufficiency.

. . . But Jesus who saves us needs access to what is within us and so exposes our insides, our inadequacies, our 'cover-ups'.

At the Table:

We are not permitted to be self-enclosed.

We are not permitted to be self-sufficient.

The breaking of our pride and self-approval is not a bad thing;

It opens us to new life, to saving action.”

It is part of the rhythm of waiting, the rhythm of being strengthened in the presence of the Lord

Giving:

“Jesus gives back what we bring him, who we are; and we receive what he gives.

This is the Holy Communion” – that takes place in the everyday rhythms of our lives.

Yet, what Jesus gives us “is no longer what we brought. It has been changed into what God gives.

This is what we sing of as 'amazing grace.'

Everything we bring to Jesus is given back, but lavishly - the twelve baskets.”

Jesus saying "do this" is to do the whole thing – for it to shape the rhythms of our lives

As we learn the practice of communion, of table fellowship, we learn the practice of waiting on God, the practice of hoping on Yahweh

– a waiting hope, a hopeful waiting.

We discover the rhythms of life that God has created for us to live in.

And, rather than sapping us of strength, God’s rhythms, God’s Spirit enlivens us, renews us so that we might soar with the Spirit of God.

Let us learn to dance with God – as we learn to wait on God, to sense the life rhythms of God – **and let us do this as we celebrate communion.**