

P.S. 2020 Lessons We're Learning
"We're Learning that God is for us!"
August 23, 2020

Overarching theme: In 2020, FUMC will be a **GO** church!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

Isaiah:

Isaiah is one of Bible's most well-loved books. It is also one of its most complex works, because it reflects settings that span hundreds of years of Judean history. Some parts refer to the late 8th century BCE when Assyria dominated the ancient Near East. Some parts refer to Babylonian times, and other parts emerged deep into, if not beyond, the era of Persian rule that began in the late 6th century.

No other prophetic book is more often quoted in the New Testament, or appears more frequently in the Jewish annual lectionary and contemporary Catholic and Protestant lectionaries.

Isaiah was Amoz's son and is the Bible's only 8th-century prophet in Jerusalem. He was a sophisticated poet with an educated grasp of Israel's traditions. He enjoyed ready access to Kings Ahaz and Hezekiah, but insisted that Jerusalem's elite bear deep ethical responsibility for those they governed. Prominent in his own prophecies, as well as in those that were later added to his book, are the paired expressions "justice" and "righteousness." Isaiah held that being God's people involved not only worship of Jerusalem's God but also behavior consistent with God's plans. God's care extended especially to the people without wealth, who stood outside the halls of power. Isaiah was appalled by those who used the legal system to enrich themselves and cheat the needy.

Isaiah 40-55 consists of more self-contained and unified poetic sections associated with the end of the Babylonian exile and the hope that those who had been removed from Jerusalem would return and resettle. Here a thoroughly monotheistic vision of God as the only God, the creator of heaven and earth, is proclaimed over

and over, alongside a hopeful vision of restoration for Jerusalem and Jerusalem's people.

-adapted from the CEB study bible, pp 1091-92

Reflect on this Scripture:

Isaiah 40:27-31 CEB

- 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.*

Commentary:

In this final unit of Isaiah 40, it is made clear that the host of heaven is fully under the control of the One God, The Holy One, the Creator of heaven and earth. God calls them, having been the one who first gave them a name. This emphasis on God's total grasp of every star in the sky – not one missing – is meant to anticipate the concern of Jacob/Israel that somehow God has disregarded or forgotten about the way of the people. The one who calls each of the host of heaven by name and who can tell if just one is missing has an understanding that is unsearchable. The issue is not God's grasp, but Israel's weariness and exhaustion. The final verses allow God to get the true issue on the table, by ignoring the content of the disputation in the name of addressing the real underlying problem: Israel's exhaustion and weariness, which have been wrongly attributed to disregard by God.

God addresses this charge not by insisting Israel is wrong, that God has not disregarded her rights, but by strengthening and encouraging Israel and by insisting that weakness and powerlessness are never roadblocks to God's grace.

– adapted from the New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol VI, pp 344,346

This week – We're Learning that **God is for us.**

*"My way is hidden from the LORD,
my God ignores my predicament"?*

During a difficult season, who among us has never experienced the sentiment above? Certainly the prophet has picked up on this undercurrent as he lived among the Judean exiles during their long, forced sojourn in Babylon. And likely many of us have experienced similar emotions during our "exilic" seasons, include this pandemic. So how do we respond when we feel like our prayers go unheard, or that our predicament is being ignored?

While Isaiah 40 acknowledges these feelings in the journey of faith, the prophet challenges us not to become immobilized there. He reminds us of these important truths – that regardless of our current feelings and circumstance, God is everlasting, is with us, and does not grow tired. In fact, God not only does not become weary, but God gives strength to weary mortals who put their hope in him.

This hope (traditionally rendered as "waiting" for the Lord) is not a passive experience, but an active trust in the One who is for us, not against us (Romans 8:31). The promise for those who hope in the Lord is that they

*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.*

Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:

As you think about this passage, how can you respond to this Scripture:

1. Can you think of a time when you felt ignored by God? What helped you work through that feeling?
2. The exiles were apparently feeling a sense of weariness that was more than physical. What do you think was so spiritually exhausting for them? For us?
3. What do you think it means to "hope in the Lord?"
4. How can this kind of hope renew a person's strength?
5. How can we grow as a community of hope in these days of limitations and physical distance?

Activity for the life of a disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this Scripture this week: Isaiah 40:31

*...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.*

3. Consider the lessons that you are learning in this season, and consider how you can point others (who may be feeling spiritually exhausted) to the God of hope in these challenging days.