

November 11, 2018
Sermon for Armed Forces Sunday
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Isaiah 40:28-31

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Isaiah 40:28–31 (ESV)

²⁸ Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. ²⁹ He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. ³⁰ Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; ³¹ but they 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.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior,
Jesus Christ!

Amen.

The basis for today's sermon is recorded in Isaiah 40 as we consider the theme,
"The LORD shall renew their strength."

This is a verse of pure Gospel! The prophet Isaiah calls to mind the desperate
circumstances of God's people in Babylon. The people of Israel were captured and
enslaved because of their disobedience of God.

They were strangers in a foreign land. However, the Lord reminds His people that
they are not forgotten or abandoned. The Lord will soon rescue them from bondage.

"They shall mount up with wings like eagles."

This is a foretaste and future fulfillment of Christ on the cross. Not stuck in the sticky mud
of sin in this world. But soaring above this sinful world like eagles.

With that in mind and in truth, today is a great day; a day of thankfulness!
And as redeemed children of God in Christ Jesus, forgiven and restored, we take time to
acknowledge and say, "Thank you." Thank you first to our Lord Jesus for His coming
into the world to redeem us from our sins.

But also on this Veteran's Day observance, we say "Thank you" for the men and
women who serve and have served our nation.

"Thank you" for their families who stand beside them while they enter military
service, deploy in harm's way and return home.

We should understand giving thanks as we are indeed a thankful people by way of
our redemption in Christ.

We gather in worship. We hear God's Law and are reminded of our fallen humanity and sinfulness — helpless and pathetic, beat up and tired, and the sad thing is, it is our own doing. It's due to our fallen condition. We are sinners. We are miserable for it and deserve nothing but death.

But we are not abandoned! Christ comes to us and saves us from eternal death. The Son of God takes on the form of a servant and is the sacrificial lamb. Christ Jesus took our sins — all our sins — and nailed them to the cross.

We are forgiven, redeemed and restored to everlasting life. Therefore we can move forward as the prophet Isaiah said: "*They shall run and not be weary*".

We are indeed a thankful people. We join in confession of sins and receive absolution. Sins forgiven! How comforting! We are assured of pardon and peace in the forgiveness of sins by the blood of Jesus on the cross.

At the beginning of the service, we heard words of Absolution. Absolution, spoken by me, your pastor, but backed up by the blood of Christ!

You have been bought and paid for by Jesus. The words of forgiveness ring in our ears with joy-filled significance.

Through His Son, Jesus, whose death on the cross redeems us, we are lifted as on eagles' wings, pulled out of the swamp of misery and death. In our thankfulness we should be seeking out ways to live a new life because we have been made holy through the activity and work of Christ alone. What a great day.

We are indeed a thankful people. As a congregation, we can and should acknowledge and give thanks to God for those who serve and have served in the military.

As Lutherans, our strong and powerful theology of the cross allows us to recognize the role of the military and service to country as good and godly.

A long time ago, a military commander came to Martin Luther with questions concerning war, its brutality and the role that service personnel have in military conflict. So, he spoke to Luther. Pastor Luther saw many of the concerns the commander witnessed among the military personnel in Wittenberg and in 1526, he penned his advice in a short essay titled "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved."

It spoke of God's words of promise, the deep, rich theology of the cross we have as Christians confronted by war and gave advice from a caring pastor to both enlisted and officers. Dr. Luther, even in his role as pastor, was never one to sugar coat anything, much less the violence and brutality of war. Doctor Luther described the role of those in the military as holy, godly and instituted by the Lord Himself.

The following is what he said about all who serve their country in the military: "... when I think of a soldier fulfilling his office by punishing the wicked, killing the wicked, and creating so much misery, it seems an un-Christian work completely contrary to Christian love. But when I think of how it protects the good and keeps and preserves wife and child, house and farm, property, and honor and peace, then I see how precious and godly this work is."

Luther understood the world as a place of sin and fallen humanity. He knew of the violence of war and in how ghastly a manner it devastates nations, institutions, the land and its citizens. Luther pointed to Holy Scripture. Romans 13, which begins "*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.*"

Luther said, tells us with clarity that God honors the sword. Like those in Luther's day, we also know about sin. We know about conflict and dissensions.

We know about war. Some of you have served in war zones. War is horrific. It should never be glorified. Never actively sought by a country. Never seen as a solution when other opportunities present themselves. All of you here know someone who served in the military or have served yourselves. Many know men and women who died in service to our country. Some of you know those who were wounded. Still others know men and women who returned from harm's way and were never the same.

There is no greater way to acknowledge those who serve and thank God than sharing from the prophet Isaiah: *"But they 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"* (Is. 40:31).

The words of the prophet Isaiah recorded in the 40th chapter are certainly among the most famous passages in Scripture. The comforting promises of God are so powerful. They resonate even in a culture looking for peace and consolation.

So many people in our American society today are simply tired. They are worn out and fatigued by what they see around them. The causes of being worn out are endless, but we understand it as sin and the consequence of living in a fallen world.

The words of Isaiah are placed in Holy Scripture to give encouragement to God's people. By the time of Isaiah's prophecy, things looked dismal for the children of God. As a consequence of their rebelliousness, they are ripped away from the land of

Israel and Jerusalem, and its temple is destroyed. Israel is held in captivity — locked away in a foreign land. The war brought desolation, slavery and death.

It was a crushing, humiliating defeat. At the time of this prophecy, they are enslaved to the rulers of Babylon. Far from home with broken hearts, they long for restoration with God. They are a tired and defeated people.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God speaks words of consolation, restoration and peace. Chapter 40 is all about comfort, the steadfastness of God's Word and promise. The chapter points to the coming of Christ. It assures the people of the supreme power of the eternal God over nations and powers.

Isaiah brings encouragement, reminding them they still belong to the Almighty. God keeps and fulfills His promises. Therefore "they were able to walk and not faint".

Today, as those redeemed by Christ, we still need to hear these promises! Due to our fallen humanity, it is essential to recognize God is in control of every aspect of our lives. Knowing God is in control is a great comfort to those in all walks of life, including those who serve in the military.

Our men and women who serve do so voluntarily and keep us safe from our enemies. As Luther said in citing the book of Romans, service in the military is a godly, blessed vocation. It is not without peril or self-sacrifice. But it is a good thing to serve your nation.

Those who serve need to hear the Good News that they, too, are granted life eternal through Christ Jesus. Talk with those who serve. All have had experiences of being alone while guarding the frontiers of our freedom. Those in the military understand what it means to be weary and tired. Standing watch when fatigued.

Pulling guard duty while “bone tired.” Scanning a perimeter while suppressing thoughts of home so you stay focused on the mission. Analyzing complicated data while your heart is elsewhere. Military service can also be routine and sometimes boring. Walking patrols for endless hours. Sitting and waiting for everything from food to fuel to transportation. This monotony is often broken by terror and violence.

In addition, many Christians serve our country as leaders in the military. They carry a burden to care for people under their charge. Military leadership has a unique burden — it is the leader who decides who is placed in harm’s way.

This is just a small snapshot of sacrifice and military service. Hearing the words of Isaiah 40, “*they shall renew their strength,*” is such good news. It is rooted in Christ. “*They shall mount up with wings like eagles*” has worked its way into secular society and contemporary Christian music. Oftentimes they don’t get it right. Posters of Is. 40:31 adorn gymnasiums, locker rooms and places of business.

They typically show a sweeping portrait of a magnificent eagle. The bird is lifting high, soaring above a rugged, impassable mountain. The words “on eagles’ wings” is scrolled on the poster in waxing calligraphy. It’s as if to say: “It’s going to be alright. Keep trying. You can do it. Eventually, you’ll soar above obstacles if you try hard enough. Your personal best will happen, and you will meet your sales quota.”

But much more is going on in this verse than achieving goals and overcoming obstacles. This is a verse about God and His plan of salvation — a plan which you do not have the capability to accomplish.

“But they 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” (Is. 40:31).

This about the promise of God that freed the children of Israel from captivity. This is about the promise of God that points to the cross and the sending of a Messiah, freeing humanity from bondage and slavery to sin.

This is the force and power behind words of such comfort and peace.

As Christians, we know this well. Hymn writers know about the beauty of God's promise from Isaiah 40. There are over 250 hymns in the English language attributed to Isaiah 40! Among the more popular are "Fight the Good Fight," "From All That Dwell Below the Skies," "On Eagles' Wings" and "This Is My Father's World."

All revolve around God's promise of salvation and His activity alone to rescue humanity through Jesus.

There is much, much more to be said about this verse than secular authors and artists give it credit for. The prophet Isaiah wants you to hear God's Good News of "Christ alone" forgiveness. This is what strengthens us. This is what lifts us up. It is the greatest act of love in human history. It is Christ's suffering and death on the cross that reconciles us to God. It is all about what He has done for you!

God is lifting us up through Christ on the cross.

Isaiah clearly prophesies about a great and wonderful act only accomplished by God.

This magnificent deed is only achieved through Jesus.

Hear again the words of Is. 40:31: *"But they 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."*

This is a day of giving thanks.

Be thankful for those who took up our country's call to serve our nation and their families.

Be thankful for the love of God in Christ Jesus, whom the prophet Isaiah prophesies about. By Christ's death, we are renewed to life everlasting.

We shall run and not be weary. We shall walk and not faint. Only in Christ Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus!

Amen.

S. D. G - Soli Deo Gloria

To God alone be glory

Sermon Outline

They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength

Isaiah 40:28-31

1. They shall mount up with wings like eagles.
2. They shall run and not be weary.
3. They shall walk and not faint.

Outline by the Rev. Dr. Steven Hokana, assistant director, LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces