

Sermon      The Almightyness of God      08.02.15  
Isaiah 40:21-31      Julian Templeton      Highgate URC

Tiredness, lethargy, weariness, exhaustion; these are the symptoms of something I've decided to call Februaryitis. The celebrations of Christmas and New Year and Epiphany often buoy us up to face the cold and dark of January, but what is there is February to look forward to? The nights are still long, the temperatures cold, we can easily become run down, making us susceptible to illness. What word of cheer and hope is there? Do we find it in the start of the politicians' four-month election campaign? Do we find it in the news reports about the climate or the economy or some hoped-for resolution to conflicts? I must confess that all these sources of news can make me rather depressed. This is why I take great comfort and hope from the promise in Isaiah 40:

The Lord is the everlasting God;  
the Creator of the whole earth.  
He never grows weary or exhausted . . .  
. . . he strengthens those who are tired and weak.  
Isaiah 40:28-29

If the Lord God never grows weary or exhausted, he must have access to a source, or must himself be the source, of eternal energy and power. When the biblical writers and the Church claim that God is *Almighty*, they are claiming that *God is the source* of eternal energy and power. God's almighty is one of his attributes or perfections. An attribute is an aspect of God's nature. It is a characteristic we ascribe to God when we ask the question: What is God like? What kind of God is he? When the prophet claims that God never grows weary or exhausted, and when the psalmist claims that God 'neither slumbers nor sleeps' (Ps. 121:4), they are effectively claiming

that God is Almighty. God has in himself unlimited power that means he is never lacking in energy, he never tires, and he never needs to sleep. Significantly, though, the author of Genesis claims that God rests. At the end of the first creation story in Genesis we read:

On the sixth day God finished the work that he had done . . . and on the seventh day he rested and blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it he rested from the work of creating.

Gen. 2:2-3

Note that the author does not claim that God was tired, only that he rested on the seventh day. We who then read further know how important the seventh day, or Sabbath, will be for the people of Israel. And what is the Sabbath, or for Christians the Lord's Day on Sunday, if not a form of waiting on the Lord? On the Lord's Day we gather to worship God and wait to receive his Word. It is a day of rest and worship that is deliberately different from the other days of work and activity. And it is supposed to be different because it is a day of restoration and re-creation for we whose energies are limited and need to be regained and renewed. And we hope to be renewed by waiting on the Lord God whose energy is unlimited because he is Almighty.

To claim that God is Almighty is an implication of the belief that God is *Creator*. Out of the fullness of his all-powerful being, God creates and brings life where there was none before. This means that everything that is created ultimately derives its energy and power from the God who created it. And this truth prompts the author of Isaiah 40 to make what is, perhaps, one of the most inspiring promises in the whole of the Scriptures:

Those who wait on 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. 40:31

Waiting—deliberately refraining from activity, physical or mental—is actually one of the most difficult things for some of us to do. We are conditioned to being active, we gain our sense of identity and worth from being active; to be passive or inactive makes us bored and restless. But if we are restless it is no wonder that we often feel tired and exhausted, since we are not giving our bodies and minds the repose they need. For example, some of us need to have short ‘sabbaticals’ from our electronic communications devices to regain our equilibrium.

What our ceaseless activity may reveal is a lack of trust in God. If, deep down, we believe that if something is going to happen we have to make it happen, then continual activity will be required from us until it does happen. While it is true when we apply our energies with persistence, worthwhile things often result; Isaiah is claiming is that ultimately our energies come from God’s unlimited energy, just as our life ultimately comes from God, the Creator and source of life.

This world is God’s world. The challenge of the life of faith is to align oneself with God’s will and plan. For when we are working with God, and resting with God, we can better align ourselves with his energies and rhythms. The Church believes that God’s will and plan has been revealed supremely in Jesus Christ. One of Jesus’s greatest promises was this:

Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon

you and learn from me . . . for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Matt. 11:28-30

To live as a Christian is to trust in Christ. Christ himself described this relationship of trust as sharing a yoke. This yoking is promised not to be burdensome because the very practice of yoking *shares the burden*. This means that Christians do not need to struggle on alone because our struggle is shared with Christ. To trust in Christ is to gain access to the life-giving relationship he was with God the Father. Especially in the Gospel According to John, Jesus describes his relationship with God the Father as being so close that they indwell one another. Jesus claims that he never acts alone but always does what his Father is doing. We might say, then, that Jesus and God the Father are yoked together in purpose and action. In the same Gospel the Holy Spirit is described as the third person who shares in the Father and Son’s work, especially conveying the effect of this work to believers. So we might say that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are yoked together in purpose, action, and effect. In taking Jesus’s yoke upon us we come under, and are lifted up and supported by, the triple yoke of the Holy Trinity.

The Spirit’s action is often compared to that of the wind, and the metaphor of wind brings us back to Isaiah’s image of the eagle:

Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall soar on wings like eagles . . .

The eagle is able to soar not only because its physiology is ideally suited to soaring but also because it trusts in the mighty winds and thermals to hold it up. Let us trust in God’s almighty power to hold us up and to renew our strength. Thanks be to God.