

There is a guy, Donnie, at my gym who always seems to finish the workout before the rest of us. What he does then is encourage the rest of us who are still trying to make it through whatever number of repetitions of movements that have been prescribed. He says – You got this! Come on! Just 10 more. And it makes a difference. I know I perk up a bit and keep going. Words of encouragement can go a long way. Even when Donnie is not around and I am struggling, his words will come to me. ‘Come on’, I hear him say.

Many of us will remember, the maid, Abiliene, in the movie *The Help*. Over and over she reminds the young daughter in the household where she works - You is kind. You is smart. You is important. She does this because the child’s mother has very few words of encouragement for her. *The Help* is a fictional story but if it was true, I think that the child would remember those words when she grew up. Those would be words that would shore her up to remind her that she was kind, smart and important. Even though it is a story, those words took on a power of their own. After the movie came out, I heard them quoted over and over. They spoke to people because I think people needed to hear them.

When I think of “You is kind. You is smart. You is important.” I remember who encouraged me and the importance of encouraging others especially in the midst of hard times.

This is what the writer of Isaiah is doing for the Israelites in our Old Testament reading. They are in exile. They have walked thousands of miles and are living in a foreign country. Their place of worship has been destroyed. They have no idea when they will ever go back and there seems no end in sight. They are weary.

And so the prophet says,  
*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.  
He gives power to the faint,  
and strengthens the powerless.*

The Lord is there for you. God is everlasting. The creator of absolutely everything. You may be faint and weary but God will not be faint and weary. God can strengthen you and give you power. Did those words keep the Israelites going? Did it help them get through their days? Did it give them hope? I tend to think so since these writings are with us today. They must have been very important.

My friends, we are standing in a place not so different than the Israelites. We may not be thousands of miles away from home, but we have found exile right here in the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been months and months and months of isolation, mask wearing, loss of jobs, deaths, and more. Finally, the vaccine is here, but getting it is

proving to be difficult. Even with the vaccine, the protocols continue – the mask wearing, the six feet apart and everything else must continue. We are weary – very weary – and here come these words from the prophet.

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I want you to spend time with these words. I actually want you to spend time with the whole passage because in it I hear the deep encouragement we are all in need of. One of the ways I tell people to prepare for reading in church is to read the passage over and over again.

Read it out loud every day of the week before the Sunday you are to read in church, because the more you read it, the more it will seep into your being. When you read the words that are a part of you, you proclaim them differently and others will hear that difference.

What will happen if you take this passage from Isaiah and read it every morning for the next week. Read it slowly. Let the words sink in. Let the words lift you up. Be reminded of our powerful creator who is always there and always ready to shore us up against the waves of life that batter us over and over. Let that assurance carry us into the days to come whether it is in big or small ways.

I loved that one commentator pointed out the last lines of this reading - 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.

Do you hear the different levels of renewal? Some will be like eagles - flying, some will be running and some will be walking. Spend some time with these words from the prophet of Isaiah that were written for a weary people and that today are proclaimed to you who are weary now. See how they can encourage you and renew your strength and then see how you will walk or run or fly.