

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park and Faith Family**Title: Waiting for Hope****Lesson: Isaiah 40:21-31 NRSV**

*21 Have you not known? Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?*

*22 It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them like a tent to live in;*

*23 who brings princes to naught,
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.*

*24 Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,
when he blows upon them, and they wither,
and the tempest carries them off like stubble.*

*25 To whom then will you compare me,
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.*

*26 Lift up your eyes on high and see:
Who created these?*

*He who brings out their host and numbers them,
calling them all by name;
because he is great in strength,
mighty in power,
not one is missing.*

*27 Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,*

*"My way is hidden from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God"?*

*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 strengthens the powerless.
30 Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
31 but 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.*

A few days ago, it snowed a lot, and it will be very cold this week. In South Korea, December through February is considered as Winter, and March is considered as Spring even though March is still a little cold. I really liked the season changing from the end of February to the beginning of March because I was able to see the buds of trees that have run out of leaves and feel the energy of life again. Due to the severe cold, staying at home is longer than other seasons, but we know that spring will come soon and warm seasons will come. I pray for the day when the warm season comes soon in our lives and we can worship at the church again soon.

The book of Isaiah is divided into two main parts. Chapters 1-39 are mainly warnings of God's judgment on the human beings who serve the idols. And, chapters 40 to 66 are about God's glory, compassion and grace. Chapter 40 we read today is the important part changing to a new message. A lot of time passed after the people of Israel became prisoners of Babylon. The first and second generations died, and the third and fourth generations continued their lives. Finally, however as Jeremiah predicted, God was opening a new way of salvation for them.

Isaiah 40:3 tells that "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." It was the news that they were getting out of their captivity and going back to the wilderness. However, for them, the wilderness was not a hopeless wilderness in uncertainty. It meant a new path that

God prepared. For them, the wilderness was the path of peace, the path of freedom, and the path of salvation.

The Israelites were surprised to hear the prophet's prophecy. And they may have asked: "How does God, who seemed helpless, do this? How will God, who has coldly turned a blind eye to our suffering, do this?"

The scripture reading we read today includes the answers about Israelites' doubts, skepticism and distrust. Isaiah clearly announces that God is the creator of this world in response to their questions. For the Israelites who had served idols for a long time, Isaiah reminds them that they have forgotten God: "Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?" (21)

For those who have been prisoners for a long time and have been disobedient, Isaiah emphasizes the greatness of God. Everything in the world belongs to God. The things we think are great, all the things we value, are useless things before God. Paul confesses: "More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ." (Philippians 3:8, NRSV) He exists beyond all the knowledge and experiences we have besides knowing God. Therefore, we should not judge God's work from our narrow views and perspectives.

Like this, Isaiah awakened the wandering Israelites by proclaiming who their God is and told them that God has never given up on them and gives them courage and hope and still loves them, even though they served idols and forgot God. As you already know, January 18th was Martin Luther King Jr. Day. He quotes Isaiah 40:4-5 in his famous "I Have A Dream" speech and says that "With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood..."

His dream was that everyone would see the glory of God, that God's justice would be realized all over the land, that rough places would be flattened and everyone would see it together, that African Americans and Anglos would sit together at the table of brotherhood, that oppression and injustice would be changed to freedom and justice.

As Martin Luther King Jr quoted Isaiah 40, Isaiah's prophecy is not just a record from thousands of years ago but is still alive and applicable. The reason we can have an impossible dream is because the creator God is fair and righteous. This faith gives us confidence that when we are discriminated against by injustice, truth will be revealed someday.

The message of Isaiah promises us that God will help us when we are in despair. Verses 28-31, NRSV tells that "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. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but 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." Those who wait for the Lord and those who wait for the help of God shall receive renewed strength. Our gracious God shall give new strength to those who seek truth and justice.

Prophet Isaiah encourages the people of Israel to know and embrace the truth that God is the master of this world and the one and only God who built all the things in this world. Our faith, attitudes, and behaviors are based on these confessions. As Christians, we must open our ears and obey the guidance of the Lord. Listen to other people's cries. The Covid-19 situation has been maintained for a long time. As we are all going through this, the situation is not positive to us. However, the reason why we can't be frustrated in this situation is that we believe in the Lord of Hope, who is pouring us endless love. Our God shall give us new strength and change this difficult situation into the situation where we can laugh, just as the season of Winter changes to Spring. Thanks be to God.