

First Presbyterian Church
Greenfield, Indiana
Pastor John J. Paulson
February 8, 2009 5th Sunday In Ordinary Time

HOPE!

Psalm 147:1 – 11, 20c	God provides!
Isaiah 40:21 – 31	Have hope in the Lord!
Mark 1:29 – 39	God is compassionate!
1 Corinthians 9:16 – 23	God calls us to service

Informally Before the Sermon: What a lovely day. Feels like a spring weekend. A week before we celebrate the day of love, Valentine's Day. If you walk through the mall, expect to be blinded by red. Red clothes in the store windows, red hearts hanging on store walls, a big red reminder from one of the local heart hospitals that it is time to have your heart checked. Lots about love, but, of course there is no mention of God's love, the most important love of all. Has our society forgotten how important God's love is in our lives?

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations in our hearts be pleasing to you, Oh Lord, our rock and redeemer. Amen.

Our passage from Isaiah begins with a challenge, to them and to us. "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth." It is a rhetorical question; Isaiah knows the answer he wants. It is a question like when your mother used to ask you as you put on our coat about 6:30 in the evening "Are you going out again tonight?"

Isaiah expects us to answer , "of course we know. Of course we have heard. We have heard it ever since we first heard about God. We know all about our God We know the stories from Genesis about Creation. We know that God is the Creator of the ends of the earth.

We know how God treated Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah. We know the stories about David's successes and failures. We know how God treated the people who believed and did what is right, and how God treated the people that didn't believe and didn't do what is right.

Of course we know that God understands us.

We know the Ten Commandments and we do our best to follow them.

We know God's love is steadfast and forever.

And, you know what, Isaiah, we know something you only dreamed about. We know God's Son, Jesus and what he did for us.

Oh, we may have forgotten it for a minute or two, Isaiah, but of course we know our God. We know all about God's love in our lives.

But, you know what? I don't think Isaiah would be satisfied with our merely saying "yes, we know all about God." It is almost as if Isaiah can see right through us. Isaiah thinks that maybe we need a reminder. He's not going to let us get away with just a simple answer and let us go on our merry way.

He wants us to think about it. He knows that if we do, if we take some time and really think about God, it will help us, it will renew us, it will strengthen the hope that God brings into our lives.

So, let's do a little bit of thinking this morning about God, using some of the images that Isaiah presents to us.

If you have ever flown in an airplane, you know how the earth looks from thousands of feet in the air. When you are above the clouds, of course, you can't see anything except the brilliance of the clouds; then, a break in the cloud cover comes into view and you can look down and see the ground passing by. If the pilot is in a friendly mood, you may be told to look to the right or the left where you see a mountain peak or a river or lake, or maybe the bright lights of a city you are flying over. Then, as the plane begins to lose altitude in preparation for landing, you see things in much more detail. Matchbox cars become full sized Fords and Chevrolets; ribbons of white become six-lane superhighways; blotches of green become backyards; grasshoppers become people. As the plane descends, you gradually see the world as you know it.

That may well be the way God sees our world, at least Isaiah plants that idea in our minds when he writes that God "sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers."¹ The people look to God just like the people we see from the plane; they all look alike; they all look like insects, like grasshoppers when we look from a great distance.

¹ Unless otherwise identified, quotes are from Isaiah 40: 21 – 31 (NIV)

Wouldn't it be horrible if that was the only thing we knew about God? High and mighty. Sitting on a throne high above the earth looking down at insignificant, indistinguishable dots on our planet.

But, Isaiah wants to remind us that God is not like that. God cares about us and supports us when we need support, and, at times, we all do.

Somehow Isaiah knows his readers. His readers then, and his readers now. He knows that they forget sometimes? Is it easy to forget that God is always with us, always watching. Is it easy to forget that we are human and God is God? Is it easy to fall into the trap of thinking that we can do it all; and that we can do it all without any help from God?

Isaiah wants us to take a step back and think about it. Think about our humanness and God.

If you watched the Super Bowl, you saw James Harrison run the length of the field with an intercepted pass through the entire Arizona Cardinal team; then when he reached the goal line, you saw him stumble and fall, exhausted, out of breath. At times in our lives people of all ages get tired and weary and even young men stumble and fall and need assistance. But not God, this everlasting God, this Creator of the ends of the earth. Unlike us, God does not grow tired or weary.

Isaiah wonders why we complain that God is not with us; that God does not care about us. Isaiah reminds us that we can not even fathom the fact that God cares about us; that God really understands us. We may well wonder why this God, this Creator of the universe, cares for us, understands us, knows the problems we face, the temptations that come our way as well as the frustrations we encounter day after day.

He asks us that question again, "Do we not know? Have we not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God who understands us and supports us. God gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak."

Isaiah wants us to know that God brings hope into our lives. Isaiah says for us not to place our hope in princes and rulers; they fade away, but God is with us forever. God can't be compared to anyone or anything. God is God, and that's all there is to it. God knows the stars and has named them all. Knows where each one

of them is and where it should be. Knows us; knows where each one of us is and where we should be. That is a God we can trust! That is a God we can place our hope in! And, Isaiah knows it and wants to be certain that we know it too!

“Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.”

What wonderful images those are. Wonderful images of the way our lives unfurl from childhood. We have to walk before we can run, and run before we can soar. That’s the way it is with our knowledge and understanding of God, and the hope we place in God. As our understanding of God grows, so does the hope God brings into our lives.

Of course, before we walk, we crawl. We begin hearing Bible stories from parents or grandparents. We come to church in infant seats and hear wonderful music. We can’t do much for ourselves; we depend on others to help us learn about God.

Then we begin the walking phase of our journey, a phase of our learning that begins with prayers and stories from our parents or grandparents; it continues in a more formal way through Children’s Church and Sunday School where we start getting a better understanding of God in our lives. We may have a children’s Bible full of pictures that we can read for ourselves. We start by learning about God’s power and grace; we learn about God’s love and begin understanding how important God is in our lives and the lives of others. We come to church and sing hymns, light candles and listen to the scriptures.

Maybe we begin running when we take Confirmation Class and are confirmed as members of the local church. We are introduced to the creeds and practices of our denomination as well as to the beliefs of others. We learn about the responsibility of belonging to an organization dedicated to worshipping God and Jesus as well as helping others in their names. We find out there are others who don’t believe the same as we do.

Then, if we get running fast enough, we begin to soar. We volunteer to help others, we read scriptures on our own, we join Bible study groups, we support our church financially and in other ways; we serve on church committees and may be

elected Elders. Our relationship with God grows day by day. We are truly soaring. A wonderful feeling of peace and freedom. Soaring on wings like eagles with God.

Oh, if we could only keep on soaring for ever. But, this is life. At some point we all hit some turbulence that may cause us to come back down to run some more or even to walk a bit. Sometimes, we even return to the crawling phase where we need God to just shower us with grace because we can't understand what is going on. We have forgotten how to walk, let alone run or soar with God.

And, Isaiah wants us to know that God is always there with us. Always there with a hand outstretched to give us support and help us get up and walk.

Isaiah never wants us to forget that the Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. That God will never grow tired or weary, and that God knows us, understands us. That we can have hope in the Lord that lets us soar on wings of eagles, run and not grow weary, and walk and not be faint.

“Do you not know? Have you not heard?

Has it not been told you from the beginning?

Have you not understood since the earth was founded?

He will not grow tired or weary,

and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.”

AMEN