

September 5, 2021 Praying God's Truth Over My Fears
Isaiah 40:28-31

One of my favourite authors J. R. Tolkien wrote a novel called *The Hobbit*, and a series of 3 novels entitled, *The Lord Of The Rings*. He wrote *The Lord Of The Rings* as an exercise to combat his illness, Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. That phrase was unknown in Tolkien's time. But here is the story. In University, he and 4 friends met and became very close. They were a fellowship. They did everything together. When World War 1 broke out, they signed up as loyal young Britons and went off to war. Tolkien was the only one to return unscathed from that terrible experience. In *The Lord Of The Rings* he fictionalized and recreated the fellowship that had been so important to him. And through battles, trials, temptations in a classic battle with evil, he brought the nucleus of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, home, safe and sound.

The reason I tell you that story is that Tolkien was a believer. As a professor he was a close friend of C. S. Lewis who wrote the *Narnia* series of novels as a way of sharing his faith with the world. While Tolkien was never so clear in his spiritual declarations, the force behind the trials and temptations faced by his fictional *Fellowship of the Ring*, is the Sauron, the Prince of Darkness. And in both *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings* there are moments when it appears there can be no escape from death. But guess what happens? The heroes are borne away on the wings of giant eagles, to heal, to recover, and to re-enter the struggle, in the end to celebrate victory and return

home. Such is the profound effect that Isaiah 40:31 has had on our culture in the 20th century, and the 21st. The books were written in the 20th, the films which have become classics, were made in the 20th and the 21st.

And here is the confession of faith that is pronounced in Isaiah chapter 40. “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. 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.” It is a declaration that God Almighty, revealed in flesh and blood in Jesus Christ, with us in the power and sweetness of the Holy Spirit is the One who not only made the heavens, and the earth and us, but is in charge. And when it comes to our own particular adventures in life, our own particular quests and battles, he gives strength to the weary, and He increases the power of the weak. As my mother would say when I was very young, and our family faced trials, “When it is really dark and the way is hard, God takes a hand.”

In verse 30 of this chapter of Isaiah we are told the truth. You can see it visually every time we watch the Olympics, and especially in contests like the Marathon. The athletes are all very young compared to us. “Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall.” Several Olympics ago, and I can still replay the image of what happened in my mind, a young black Marathoner, stumbled and fell. He could have quit. He could have said, I have endured enough pain, this just is not my day. But he struggled to his feet, and he began to run again.

He stumbled and fell several times. And each time he fought his way back to his feet and began to run. When he entered the stadium, before the gathered crowd, he fell once more, and once more he got up. Once more he began to run. No, he did not win a medal. He was the last one to finish the race in the allotted time. And the applause of the crowd was thunderous. His story continues to be shared as a prototype of the spirit of the Olympian athlete. He stumbled and fell. He was weary and tired. But he was given the strength that he needed to continue. And he finished the race.

In life on this earth there can be no arguing the point. There are times when we are wounded. There are times when we tire and feel we cannot go on. And there are times when we struggle, and in the midst of it all receive the strength to continue, to finish the race. The Prophet Isaiah tells us where that grace comes from. Where that strength comes from. It is not as simple as physical ability. It is spiritual in nature. And it is the gift of God. People stumble. People fall.

“But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.” That is the promise. Faith on our part, causes God to smile upon us, and HE is not just an observer of what we are experiencing. HE touches us. HE lifts us up. Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. It is not just that they gut it out. God touches them. They find their strength renewed because God anoints them with it. And they rise, in the race of life and once again they begin to run. In fact they do not just run....they tend to fly.

That is the promise. “They will soar on wings like eagles.” In Northwestern Ontario, northwest of Lake Nipigon, there is a river and a chain of lakes that are named Obonga. Obonga lake is in fact simply the 3 widest parts of the river, like links of sausage, approximately a mile across, and sixteen miles long. Obonga river, and its lakes are one of the natural habitats in Ontario of the American Bald Eagle. My late Father-in-law was a landscape painter in his retirement. He built and owned a cottage on Obonga Lake and our young family would make the trek from Pickering Thunder Bay and then north to the cottage. Its not that we would see eagles often. But every summer there was that magical moment when we would be looking out over the water, and at least once I and my children were fishing at the weed bed. A mature eagle with its marvelous white head, and its cold beak came flying down the lake past us. We were in an aluminum boat. It swooped low. It touched the water with its claws. And it rose up and flew with a fish in its grasp, to return to its young and feed them. And our spirits soared with that eagle. It made our day! It is an important memory.

And yes, there are moments when I feel tired and weak. Times when I stumble and fall, or at least when I feel like that is what is happening. I have a number of things that I keep around me at the house to remind me of this text. There is a small aluminum frame in the area where I watch television. Baseball. Football. Hockey. And some movies. The frame is divided into 2 sections. On the right hand is the clock. Simple ordinary clock. On the left side is an image of the sky, filled with

clouds, like there is going to be a thunder storm. And against that backdrop the eagle flies, wings outstretched. Soaring on the wind. And of course the words, the all important words of the promise..."They that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles."

This morning we begin a new series. You have heard the words of the promise. Now let us turn to the Lord and pray in the midst of our experience. Let us pray.

O Lord our God, when we in awesome wonder/
Consider all the worlds your hands have made/
We see the stars. We hear the rolling thunder,
Your power throughout the universe displayed/
Then sings my soul, my Saviour, God to thee. Here
us Lord as we bow before you. Be with us when we are weak.
Be with us when we stumble. Be with us when we fall. In our
woundedness we bow before you, claiming the promise
contained in your word. Grant that we might soar like the
eagle does. Renew our strength. That we might run and not
grow weary, that we might walk and not grow faint. In Jesus
name we pray. Amen

