

“Recharging”

A sermon in the series
**“Summer Memories:
Scripture Verses Worth Remembering”**
by the Rev. Dr. Jon M. Fancher
Rocky River Presbyterian Church, Rocky River, Ohio
July 23, 2017

- Isaiah 40:28-31
Memorization Verse: 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.
- Ephesians 1:15-23 ¹⁹...How very great is his power at work in us who believe. This power working in us is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ which he used when he raised Christ from death and seated him at his right side in the heavenly world.
- Sermon-in-a-sentence: When we wait on the Lord, God renews our strength.

About two months ago when I chose this memorization verse as part of this summer sermon series, I did not foresee how appropriate this verse would be for the week I just experienced, especially the part about “waiting for the Lord.” Let me come back to that.

If you look at the book of Isaiah as well as many other places in the Bible, some of the text is narrative, perhaps telling a story, or recounting history, presenting a conversation. Bible editors have laid out such texts in familiar paragraph form. Other sections of the Bible, like today’s verses from Isaiah, are laid out like poetry. That’s because it is poetry. In English we often recognize poetry because of the rhythm of the words or because of a rhyming pattern. Hebrew poetry is often recognizable by its use of “parallelism,” which in its simplest form is a restatement of a thought using different words. Look on the back page of today’s bulletin for the excerpt from Isaiah Chapter 40. In particular, look at verse 31’s first line: “...but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.” The poet uses parallel or similar thoughts in the next three lines to describe what it might be like if the Lord renews their strength:

They’ll mount up with wings – take flight – like eagles;
They’ll run but not grow weary;
They’ll walk and not even faint.

So say you want to memorize this verse to become a resource for you when you are worn out or discouraged; if you memorize the first line, the next three lines are simply variations of the first: “renew their strength... mount up like eagles... run but not be weary... walk but not faint.”

What does it mean for believers to “wait for the Lord?” Isaiah doesn’t use that phrase, “wait for the Lord,” to suggest that we stubbornly wait for God to do what we want God to do. No, in urging Israel to “wait for the Lord” Isaiah suggests that by “waiting for the Lord” believers open themselves to trust in whatever it is that God has in store.

How do you “wait for the Lord?” By setting aside time... and attentiveness... and a willing spirit. When you “wait for the Lord” you are more likely to notice God’s presence and activity in your daily life.

This week Jess and Jacob and me – the “Three J’s” – were the small but mighty contingent from RRPC that participated in this year’s youth mission trip. They were two of 316 youth from churches in Texas, Nebraska, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, South Carolina, Arkansas, Missouri... and Ohio. Our group was the smallest. There was another contingent that had a total of five youth and adults. The largest group had seventy-two kids, though it was from a joint youth group sponsored by several

churches in their Minneapolis suburb. We were all housed in the local high school, with classrooms for our sleeping areas – boys down one hallway, girls down another. We ate in the cafeteria, worshiped in the auditorium, and the kids hung out everywhere.

Mission trips take various forms. Sometimes they involve a week of service to a local non-profit organization like a foodbank or homeless shelter or YMCA. We've done those in the past. Sometimes they're a work camp focused on completing home repairs and improvements for poorer residents or persons with physical or emotional challenges or senior citizens. That's what we did this year.

The organization that ran our work camp created fifty-three work crews out of the 316 kids plus about seventy adults including three other pastors. Kids from churches get split up so they're working mostly or entirely with kids from other churches. The crew I advised had kids from Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota. They'd never met each other until last Sunday night. Though part of your day is spent with your church's youth group, most of your day is spent with your "crew."

Each day began with a Morning Program including a brief worship component. After lunch at our worksites we had devotions with our work crew – always led by one of the kids. After dinner the work crews sat together for the Evening Program which included a lengthier worship experience. From there each church's youth group got together and headed off to some part of the school for their own devotions.

So the schedule intentionally created at least four times each day for the kids and advisors to "wait for the Lord." You "waited for the Lord" not simply to show up but to show you something. How could you create *even one time* each day for you to "wait for the Lord?" When you wait for the Lord...

- maybe God shows you something you've always "seen" but never actually noticed;
- maybe you begin to view someone with a new sense of appreciation and gratitude;
- maybe you realize that what you've always considered a character flaw in somebody is actually the scar from a trauma they experienced that they've tried to leave in the past;
- maybe you become aware that your pride and ego are keeping you from submitting to what God wants from you;
- as 316 kids coming together from north and south and east and west discovered, when you wait for the Lord, God may show you that there are people all over – people all around you – who you can serve in some way: perhaps a small or great but always meaningful way;
- and when you wait for the Lord, God just might reveal to you the reality that those opportunities to serve exist not only in some overseas mission or at some distant work camp site for a week in the summer. Opportunities to serve also exist here where you live, in your community, your church, on your street, and yes, even right in your own home.

Isaiah says that "...those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength..." Maybe a way to understanding "renewing your strength" is to think about your cellphone. As kids are very well aware, a cellphone can work only so long, and then it has to be recharged. It has to have its strength renewed.

Over the years I've chaperoned a lot of youth trips for churches and schools, and in the past ten years I've seen that one of the biggest concerns kids have while they're traveling is how and where and when they'll be able to recharge their cellphones. You pull into a rest stop or a restaurant, and kids are looking for electrical outlets. When Jacob and I joined eleven other guys who we'd be bunking with in a high school classroom, we were among the last to arrive. The early arrivals had claimed spots along the walls nearest the electrical outlets. But I had brought a power strip, and using the extension cord on an audio-visual cart, we were able to bring power to our corner of the room! Cellphones were happy.

This past Wednesday afternoon was scheduled as the "free afternoon" at work camp. Youth groups were free to do whatever they wanted. Some youth groups went to a water park, others went shopping at Wal-Mart (a real treat for the kids from rural Nebraska and Texas). Since we were in the Quad Cities I made sure Jess and Jacob and I went to the visitor center for the John Deere Company headquartered there in Moline, Illinois. The kids actually found it interesting, but I was taking them regardless. We also briefly visited the home base of the History Channel's "American Pickers" in Le Claire, Iowa. (I was taking them there regardless, too.) But then we went to the Rock Island County Fair, and we went to "Michael's Fun World" in Davenport. To my surprise, Jacob and Jess decided that it was

too hot outside to race the go-karts. But Jacob did convince Jess and me to try Laser Tag which was indoors. I'd heard of it but had never done it.

It's like the children's game of cat-and-mouse-like tag, but played amid blaring music in a darkened, eerily-lighted, obstacle-filled room... with *lasers!* Peeking through partitions and around corners and over barricades you have ten minutes to search for and shoot at each other with electronic wands that look more like kitchen faucets than revolvers, and you're wearing an electronic vest and headgear that record whether an opponent's laser scored a "hit" on you.

Though guns and shooting are not my thing, it was fun... though I never have to do it again. One of the challenges of laser tag is that every few minutes your laser runs out of shots. The voice in the headset starts repeating, "Re-energize! Re-energize! Re-energize!" and you have to return to a home base where a device quickly recharges your laser.

Let me say it again: you have to stop trying to keep going when you have nothing left to give. You have to return to the safety of the home base and reconnect to the source. You have to wait...

Am I talking about laser tag or about life? ...Yes!

So often we are like little children who play so hard that they run out of energy. You know what happens when you see their exhaustion and suggest they take a nap...! Even in their depleted state they'll fight having to stop what they're doing in order to "Re-energize! Re-energize! Re-energize!" We, too, keep pushing and pushing ourselves, even when we're exhausted physically or emotionally... or spiritually. Especially in our culture we're so doggone sure that we have to be self-reliant, so we strive to manage everything that comes our way by trying to do it on our own:

- trying on our own to carry all the responsibilities of being an employee *and* parent *and* spouse *and* an individual with personal needs as well;
- trying on our own to navigate a tense relationship in school or at work;
- trying on our own to process grief (or trying to ignore it altogether);
- trying on our own to be perfect and to do all we can so that our shortcomings are seen by no one.

But they are. It's all seen by God who knows you can't carry the burden all by yourself. Your entire life is seen by God who understands that, despite what you may have convinced yourself, the Creator did not design you to do it all on your own.

So through the words of the prophet Isaiah God makes an offer and a promise: "Come to me. Trust in me. Live your life in me. When you find yourself rushing through your day, pushing yourself beyond your limits... wait for me. For those who wait for me shall renew their strength. Imagine springing into flight like an eagle...! Imagine enduring a marathon and being ready for more...! Imagine walking through last week's heat and never feeling faint...!"

Those are words worth memorizing. Read them with me — let's read just verse 31:

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.

This memorization verse has been popularized by a musical refrain from a Christian song. The words are on the back page of the bulletin right under the sermon title. Let's sing them as a prayer of commitment to wait for the Lord, that God will renew our strength:

"And he shall raise you up on eagle's wings
Bear you on the breath of dawn
Make you to shine like the sun
And hold you in the palm of His hand."¹

[sermons: se20170723; © 2017 Jon M. Fancher]

¹ "On Eagle's Wings" © 1979 New Dawn Music. Text based on Psalm 91. Words and music by Michael Joncas.