

Exile

Scripture: Isaiah 40:28-31

Written by Kaylissa Beale

We have all had situations in our lives when everything seemed stacked against us, when there was too much to do, or nothing we could do. When someone expected too much, or no one expected anything good from us. There are times when we don't have a say over the situations in our lives.

The scripture today was written during the Babylonian exile. During this time in the Israelites history the Babylonian ruler and his army came and overran Israel. They burned the temple, and killed many Israelites. Any who survived were taken back to Babylon and forced into slavery. The Israelites were told that all of this was God's punishment for things a king many of them had never known had done. Can you imagine, how lonely and abandoned these people must have felt? Not only had they lost loved ones, their home, and their temple, but they felt they had lost the favor of God.

While none of us can know what this exact situation would have been like, we can relate. There are situations today that can put us in a similar place of distress.

Fire is just as destructive now as when the temple was engulfed by it, as people all over Washington and Oregon are finding this out right now with the wildfires that continue to blaze. In Eastern Washington alone at least two towns have been evacuated with the current damage toll coming to over 100 homes. These fires have displaced over 3,000 people as they continue to ravage our dry state. Many of these people are left to live in parking lots until they can return, if they have anything to return to. One resident had just left his house before the fire arrived. He watched his house go up in flame. He told a reporter later that, "All you could do was watch her go"

Sometimes we lose control, and there is nothing we can do but watch life happen. This can be positive, but it can also be negative. When diagnoses come, as families learn to re-adjust after a

loss, or we see loved one wrestling with a mental illness but refusing to get help, all we can do is be present and pray. Although we see the times of exile approaching, we can't keep them from coming. We can't bring a loved one back; we can't cure a mental illness or physical illness.

What we do when the times of exile come is what is important. Although we may not be able to fix things, we can show we care. In the case of the wildlife, we can offer prayer. Other instances a hug or a reassuring smile may make the difference. Sometimes we forget how important the simpler gestures can be.

The Sunday after we lost a church member, I walked into the church trying my hardest to keep it together. The first person I ran into asked me how I was, and told me to be honest, and not to just tell her "I'm fine". I smiled, but started to cry. In response she gave me a hug, and told me that we would see our friend again someday, that it would be okay. Every time I caught myself crying after that I said those words and felt better.

In my sorrow I had lost sight of God's love temporarily. I found myself once again asking why bad things happen to such good people. While I still don't have a satisfactory answer to this question, I know that it isn't because God doesn't care. He cares for us in our darkest times, through those around us. God reminded me of this care and devotion through the church member who hugged me that day. She couldn't make our friend come back, but she showed me the presence of God in that hug.

I needed help seeing God's love when I couldn't see through my sorrow. I'm sure that the Israelites the same kind of help. We this need met in the scripture today.

Larry read the Common English translation of it today, and now I would like to give a version of my own.

"Come on, you know that God is all powerful, and that he never grows tired of us. He understands who we are better than we do, and he knows how to empower and revive us. Although even our youths grow physically and spiritually tired, our God is still with us. Remember that and you will be renewed and given wings to fly above these circumstances."

And there were Israelites who were able to fly above the circumstances. It is during the exile that Daniel was thrown in to the Lion's den for praying, and was saved when an angel closed the big cat's jaws.

Also during this time Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down and worship a false idol. They were thrown into a fiery furnace, but didn't burn.

These beacons of hope for the Israelites only augmented the promise Isaiah shared.

The promise that even though it didn't always feel like it, God was with them in the exile.

How powerful a message, for them and for us now.

Today we also have a promise of salvation, and see miracles as well, even if we don't identify them as such. Someone being cured of a disease, or even being able to manage it well, is a miracle. A child learning that they are important to God and to the community through our partnership with Highland Elementary School, or our Vacation Bible School is another. So is the sudden rush of relief felt here in this Sanctuary after a hard week, or a family being served through the Salvation Army.

All of these are works of God, all of these are miracles!

We are performing miracles as a church and as individuals.

And the really glorious thing about doing God's work is that we may not even realize the seemingly small things we do that may be miracles to others.

Every time we can provide a comfort during a difficult time, or inspire a genuine smile, every time we do what Jesus would, we take on the role of miracle worker.

Now, this isn't an easy role to fit and I have, at times, felt exiled in the midst of it all.

I have gotten so caught up in the work of the church that I forgot that God cares as much for me as he cares for those I am called to serve.

As miracle workers we must also keep the hope we're spreading in our hearts as an energy source. One of the ways I've found this hope is by trying something new. I was reminded of this when Debbie invited me to the Salvation Army this last month to help serve. The people I interacted with showed me God's love through smiles, and thank yous. I walked away feeling like it was important that I had gone.

While everything we do for the church and for God has its own importance, sometimes we need to change it up. If you do anything too long it becomes more mechanical than spiritual. Studies show that after repeated activity your brain goes on autopilot. This is all fine and good to some extent, things get done. But with your brain doing all the work how can you give your heart and soul to the work as well? That's why you have to keep your brain off balance enough to let your heart and soul in.

And sometimes it's enough to do the same thing, but with different people as we allow those around us to revive us.

Another thing that can also be hard, is asking for help. Even after all the times that I have proven to myself that I can't live a full life alone, I still have a difficult time admitting that fact. I also don't want to be a burden to anyone by sharing my problems. Maybe this is true for you as well. This is partly why I tried to hide my tears after losing my friend. But if you look around for just a moment, we are all the family of Christ. We are called to be here for each other, and to share the burdens that alone would keep us from flying.

So I encourage you to open your heart to what God is calling you to do this week to keep hope, and be renewed. As you do this, keep in mind that in order to fly like an eagle you have first to take a leap of faith.