

February 7, 2021

“What’s the first thing you do in the morning?”

Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake

Isaiah 40:21–31

*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?*

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

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

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.*

*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”? 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.

Mark 1:35-39

*In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and
there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they
said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” He answered, “Let us go on to the neighboring
towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.” And
he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out
demons.*

Sermon “What’s the first thing you do in the morning?”

This is going to be a simple sermon. Jesus shows us time and again how to live a spiritual life of faith and what he shares with us is simple. It only gets complex when we try and live it out in a world that often poses itself in constant contradiction to simply, loving God and loving our neighbor.

In this morning's scripture we see Jesus show us that part of loving God is spending time alone with God, giving over your worries and letting God help you make decisions. Like all relationships we have to nurture it, take care of it, and give it our attention. Prayer is one of the best ways to do this.

I think the introverts among you can really understand Jesus in this passage. He has become an overnight sensation. People are coming from all around, to have him heal them. Jesus slips away before dawn just to get away and spend some time alone with God.

As a result he knows what to do next when the disciples hunt him down like children demanding his attention. They don't seem to understand that Jesus needs time alone with God to know what to do next, to have the energy to heal others, and to have the patience to put up with them and the crowds.

Jesus shows us in this simple act a key element to a spiritual and faithful life. Taking things to God in prayer, getting direction and grounding from God and the energy to continue the work.

Martin Luther wrote: "I have so much to do today that I'm going to need to spend three hours in prayer in order to be able to get it all done."

Jesus himself shows us how to live grounded. To get up and before we do anything else ground ourselves in God, connect ourselves to God, refill, renew, refresh; and let God heal, encourage, restore, and guide us.

I don't think God said to Jesus "Go now to neighboring towns" but I absolutely believe that when Jesus got calm, quiet in his spirit, stilled the voices in his head and when he recommitted his life and ministry to God again and asked God for direction he would have the answers that he needed come to him with a certainty that only God can give.

Now I know you all are great at praying for others, I have felt those prayers more than once. But what Jesus models for us in this morning's passage shows another aspect of prayer.

It illustrates that time alone with God where we surrender our life, our cares, our feelings of being overwhelmed to God and just stay in that connection long enough to let God's energy and love heal us of the wounds of the world.

If you try to just do the work of God with out this restorative act, it will lead to burn out, but when we stay in that place of peace with God long enough we can be restored and have our goals, our visions our mission reinforced so that when we head out into our day we know what to do, where to go, who needs us next and we will have what we need to do it.

This is the self care kind of prayer and it is a necessary part of our spiritual life so that we have the energy and clarity needed to keep going.

Mahatma Gandhi said a couple things about prayer that have stuck with me through the years, I will share them with you in case you are afraid that when you pray you will do it incorrectly. He said "It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without heart."

And that "Prayer is not asking, it is a longing of the soul." Let your longings be visible to God: that longing for deeper connection, that longing for healing in your heart and relationships, that longing for peace in the world and a longing for Justice. Reveal all that longing to God.

The Isaiah passage gives us this hope too of what God can do when we give ourselves to God absolutely. It reads:

“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”.

In twelve step programs they teach to start each day with “Help”... “Help me stay sober, help me stay clean, nicotine free etc” It’s about starting each day with an intentional moment where you admit to God that you need help, that your addiction is more powerful than your own will power and that you need help outside of yourself.

There is so much power in this simple act, this grounding of our being in God. Whatever your challenges, whatever your struggles, your fears, or worries-- starting your morning with this time can make the difference between a good day and one that easily falls apart. I want to take you on a quick journey to illustrate what I’m talking about.

Take a deep breath and close your eyes. I want you to picture God, if you want to picture Jesus that’s fine, if you want to picture a beautiful being of light that’s fine too.

Whatever your concept of God is in this moment. Keep breathing deep and with each breath let go of this world, breath in love, breath out despair. I want you to place your concept of God in your favorite place in the natural world. A field of wildflowers, a mountain top, a river flowing-- and keep breathing, breathe in peace and breathe out fear.

Now picture yourself, a spiritual being having a human experience, picture yourself as spirit. Now open up the gates of your soul, your emotions, the grief from loss, your longings, the frustration with isolation, the worry about the future, your worry about loved ones. Picture all those concerns just flood out of yourself and toward God and God lovingly receiving all of that, without judgment.

Now picture God’s love flowing into you. Feel God’s unconditional acceptance of you and encouragement of you. You’ve got this, it’s going to be okay. Imagine that love flowing from God seeking out any tension in you, hunting down any self doubt, dissipating any shame or regret.

Let go with your whole being and surrender to that love. Now return the love to God, the gratitude for your life, every moment of it, every person that has come in and out of it, every lesson learned and wound healed. Keep breathing in love and letting go all day but open your eyes and rejoin us now. As we move into this hymn, keep that connection to God close.
AMEN

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