

Isaiah 40:27-31

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.

### **Those Who Wait on the Lord**

For the last three days I have witnessed an amazing amount of faith. I have seen it in most everyone here today. Furthermore, I have seen the true nature of the Church evident in this congregation. And I truly rejoice, although my body is a bit too tired to do any great dance steps or, and my voice may be a bit too tired to shout out too many hallelujahs. I'm tired, and I would guess that most of you are as well. And yet I am so inspired by so many of you, you who put your strength and spirit into pulling off an amazing Cranberry Festival despite a lot of circumstances that worked against you.

I'm reminded of the words of Winston Churchill who was speaking of the brave pilots of the Royal Air Force who against all odds drove away the German Air Force in 1940 forced Adolph Hitler to postpone his plans to invade Great Britain indefinitely. Churchill said, "Never in the history of mankind has so much been owed by so many to so few". England had just been driven out of Western Europe by the German army and it looked like England was going to collapse. The king was thinking about running away to Canada. The British government was about ready to surrender to the Germans. But the will of the British people was to fight for their survival rather than surrender and let a dictator rule over them. And so the British people **mobilized** and **organized** and **endured great pain and hardship**, but in the end they persevered. And the world is a better place because of it.

Well, you may not have considered your work during the Cranberry Festival as a life-or-death struggle against the forces of evil, but it really was. Fewer and fewer of our children care whether the Church survives or not; they may not have anything against the church, but they are not committed to seeing the church survive much less thrive. I bet everyone here can name at

least one church that has closed its doors in recent years. I bet everyone here can name a church that's on the brink of closing down. And I do not doubt that many of you here have felt like me, when I think about Bethel and all the challenges we face, you wonder how long we can keep going – sure we own property and we have investments from legacies and whatnot, but it's not enough to keep the church going ...and I know that there are all sorts of factors besides our children that determine whether a church thrives, survives, or dies, but the overall trend remains; fewer of our children are invested in the future of the church, and with that it becomes harder and harder to make ends meet, and events like the Cranberry Festival are necessary to make up the shortfall that churches experience due to less and less investment by fewer and fewer people. And those fewer and fewer people keep getting older and older.

And I want to applaud all you old people...and I'm not so young myself – I sure noticed that over the past three days. You to came bake coffee cakes and pies, to cut apples and turkeys. You went out to local businesses and promoted the ministries of this church. Then you came to make soups and serve food, and cook and clean and wash and play music, and you're old, most of you, which means this is even more of a challenge for you. I don't know how many times I saw someone looking for something that they had laid down and just couldn't remember where, or someone who said that they meant to tell me something but they just couldn't remember what. I feel your pain. I'm there: I walked into the office a few times these last few days saying, "Now what did I come in here for?" All you young folks out there; this is a sign of things to come.

But you, like the British in 1940, refuse to surrender to the forces that would attempt to overthrow the Church of Jesus Christ. **YOU WON'T LET IT HAPPEN.** Last week I emphasized how important it is for us to **ABIDE IN CHRIST**, in his word, following his commandments that we tend to the needs we see around us; I was so proud to tell Amy from NY1 how we are engaged in a feeding ministry and a ministry to the homeless, and how we support missions, local and global, how we responded to Hurricane Sandy. **WE ARE A HAPPENING CHURCH**, and I'm looking at the reason why. When giving is down and expenses are up, **you mobilize and organize and endured great pain (mainly in your back and joints) in order to keep this thing called Bethel alive and kicking.** And I could not be more proud or more humble to be your pastor having seen the amazing effort that you put into this ministry.

Faith. That's what drives you to do the amazing things that you do. Our scripture passage today speaks to a discouraged people; Jerusalem and the nation of Judea had been overrun and conquered by a foreign army. Many of the people have been hauled away as slaves to serve their new masters. Their world has turned upside down, and it's only natural that people are saying, 'My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God' They're beginning to wonder if God is even out there. They're past the point about worrying if their church is going to say open; *their church has been destroyed.* But Isaiah reminds the people who God is:

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.

Sure, bad things happen to good people, but that's not because God is sleeping on the job; It means that God has a job for us! Furthermore he gives us the resources we need to deal with the problem;

He gives power to the faint,  
and strengthens the powerless.

By Saturday afternoon I saw a lot of faint people around here, but **GOD STRENGTHENED YOU**. Carol Josey, I don't know how you managed get that entire lunch organized and off the ground with the few people you had working with you. **BUT YOU DID, AND I KNOW THAT YOUR POWER CAME FROM GOD THROUGH FAITH!**

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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.

I have seen miracles here at Bethel, and yesterday and the day before were two of them. People of faith are able to bond together with great passion and purpose to make this church something to talk about. So I take off my hat to you, and I encourage you. Mount up with wings like eagles keeping running and don't grow weary. Keep walking without growing faint.