

Isaiah 40:28-31

A reading from Isaiah:

28 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.

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

30 Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;

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.

The Word of the Lord.

Reflection

So, a little while back, I had the opportunity to hike Gray's Peak out in the beautiful state of Colorado. With a summit of just over 14,000 feet in elevation, my physical limits were definitely pushed in many ways. The steep inclines and thin air exposed my midwestern roots and

how unprepared my body was to handle such a high altitude.

Additionally, because I unfortunately lack depth perception, my hikes usually consist of me tripping over rocks or stumbling on uneven terrain. This experience was certainly no exception. All of these factors made for a slow hike with lots of breaks along the way. For me, this was a great source of shame because some poor person from my group was always stuck hanging back to make sure I made it up the mountain in one piece. In fact, I felt incredibly humbled by those who took the time to guide me through the path in front of me.

While reflecting on this passage from Isaiah, I was brought back to that time on the mountain. In that moment, I was confined by my own physical limitations. On my own, I felt weak and powerless to make it up to the summit. It was only with the support of others that I felt I had a chance of reaching the top. This was the image that came to my mind when I thought about my relationship with God over the last several years. Especially throughout my time as a college student, I have taken on many roles and responsibilities that have tested my personal limitations.

Certain semesters, I have quite literally pushed myself to the breaking point with too many credit hours and extra activities. A big part of my identity over the last four years has been the relationships that have come into my life. In some cases, I have found myself fighting for

relationships that only caused damage for all people involved. Even recently, I have encountered the challenge of pursuing a vocational path to which I ultimately became convinced I was not called. Looking back, it is easy to see how I should have handled each of these situations. However, in the midst of several chaotic or overwhelming experiences in my life, I've felt like the right thing to do, the thing that would make me a stronger person, would be to keep pushing through.

The thing about each of these circumstances is that they have made my own humanity and weakness painfully obvious. During times where I overextended myself with the commitments I had taken on, I did not stop to listen for God's direction in the midst of all of that. My commitments became what I devoted myself to when I should have been devoting myself to how I could better follow God. When I have pursued relationships that turned out to be unhealthy, I was determined to hold on to the parts that felt good and lifegiving. Ultimately, though, some of my relationships have been centered in things other than Christ. By engaging in relationships in this way, I was not modeling love for others in the way that God calls me to do so. In my pursuit of my vocational direction, I have refused to walk away from something I was not called to for fear of being labeled as a quitter. Doing so has only caused me to ignore God's voice in my life.

In each of these cases, I have dug in my heels about what I believed I was supposed to be doing and scrambled to find justifications for why God might want me to be in those situations. Thinking that I know best, however, has only led me to stumble in my walk with God. I stubbornly see what I want to see until that eventually pushes me to my wit's end. In the past, it has only been once I've reached that breaking point that I finally decide to let God in. I have to hit a certain level of rock bottom before I realize how limited my energy is and how helpless I am in this world on my own. This has affected my faith in the sense that I forget how powerful of a God that I have on my side. I forget that I am the child of a God strong enough to bring order and life out of complete chaos. I forget that it is not my own strength that I need to navigate this crazy world. The kind of strength that I need can only be found by turning to God for renewal and wisdom.

Going into my senior year, and especially one as unusual as this, I am reminded of my need to rely on God's strength instead of my own. As I look ahead with uncertainty, my future feels a bit like the top of that mountain looming in front of me. I am often keenly aware of the fact that I can't see where I will end up or how I'll get myself there. It is then that I catch myself, remembering that it's not up to me to get myself there alone. I remember that, on my own, my strength to make it from one season of life to the next will be limited. Yet, with God's help, I will

mount up on wings like eagles and soar into my future knowing that
God's strength is enough to carry me through.