

## “REAL POWER REVEALED”

Isaiah 40:21-31

February 4, 2024

If you have ever watched the **Marvel Movies** one of the villains is a character named Loki. He comes from the world of Asgard and is considered superhuman compared to us. **Loki** is a complex character, wanting to establish himself apart from his more famous brother Thor. Loki is not the most powerful of beings, a little bit crazy, and certainly narcissistic. If you follow the storyline, Loki keeps trying to rule and gain power, mostly by deception and magic. But he never seems to succeed, and in truth, he is his own worst enemy. Partly, it is because he sees power as something to dominate others by taking away their freedom. Loki misses the power of love, sacrifice, and empowering others. He sees compassion and benevolence as sentimental weakness. He wants to be admired and praised but does very little that is admirable or praiseworthy.

After, Nick Fury, director of a spy agency named Shield, imprisons Loki, they have a conversation about power. Loki mocks, **“It burns you to come so close. To have power, unlimited power. Then be reminded what real power is.”** To which Nick replies, **“Let me know if real power needs a magazine or something.”**

**Have you ever witnessed real power?** For instance, **Francis Ngannou** holds the current record for the hardest punch in the world. His punches are equivalent to 96 horsepower. That's equal to getting hit

by a Ford Escort going as fast as it can and it's more powerful than a 12-pound sledgehammer from full-force overhead. That's power!

Or what about the Wärtsilä-Sulzer RTA96-C **turbocharged two-stroke diesel** engine? This is the world's largest and most powerful production internal combustion engine. It has a maximum output of 113,000 hp. Compare that to the 191 HP of my car. Now that's power!

If we want to really talk about power, think about the force unleashed by a nuclear bomb. A small blast yields around 10 tons TNT and generates a temperature of 200 million degrees Fahrenheit. That's power!

Ironically, the prophet Isaiah is preaching to a group of Israelites who see themselves as **powerless**. They are a captured people living under the power and dominion of Assyria. They are cut off from all they knew and replanted in a community around the **capital city of Babylon**, 800 miles away from home. All around them they see the power of the empire. This is a people who have been traumatized, subdued, and seemingly forgotten.

So, when Isaiah tells them, ladies, and gentlemen, I have some good news. God is going to bring you back to your homeland, their response is less than enthusiastic. The people don't believe him. What a ridiculous notion! Have you seen the armies of Assyria and the miles of desert before us? Any resistance or rebellion on Israel's part is doomed to fail. Even if we could return our homeland it lies in ruins. Go peddle

your position thinking somewhere else. It's better to remain in our cynicism and misery than be filled with false hope. God can do nothing. God has forgotten us. Assyria is too powerful; too powerful for us, and too powerful for God.

We can sympathize with these Israelites, can't we? It's awful to feel powerless, victimized, and with no good options or foreseeable future. Yet, there are moments in our lives when we experience such feelings. When we see a loved one who is diagnosed with cancer, we feel powerless. When we watch the horrors of war in Ukraine, Sudan, and the Middle East, we wonder what we can do. When we see the ethics and morality of our nation's leaders go south, and people barely keeping their heads above financial ruin, we wonder, are there any answers.

When churches are shrinking and closing, we wonder who will bear the light to the world sitting in darkness. When we have a child with learning disabilities falling behind in school, it hurts. When floods sweep a neighbor's home away, a family member dies in a car accident, or we can't seem to break away from an addiction, it is normal for a sense of powerlessness and despair to set in. We might find ways to momentarily distract ourselves from all of this pain and suffering, but it doesn't disappear. Yes, we know that feeling of hopelessness, weariness, and despair. It is into that state which Isaiah speaks.

## **I. REAL POWER**

**“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?”** Isaiah is being sarcastic here. He asks, “Have you forgotten all the fundamentals of your faith? Don’t you remember the one who created everything and still holds it all together? What about all those stories you learned in Sabbath School that told you of God’s faithfulness and delivering power? Has God died or gone on vacation? Does not God keep his covenant promises?”

Have you ever driven through an area with a **lot of insects**? They are hitting your nice clean windshield, leaving this gooey yellow and green mess. No amount of washer fluid seems to help the situation, it just makes a bigger smear. You can’t wait to get to a gas station to wash it off. **Isaiah says**, “All those rulers who you are so afraid of, compared to God they are like bugs on a windshield.” Here today and squashed tomorrow! Are you really daring to compare the temporary power of these ruling bugs to the everlasting Holy One?

If you want to see real power just look up. **“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, and not one is missing!”**

### **(Power Point - Stars)**

Isaiah wants the people to marvel at the vastness, beauty, and majesty all around them and know that it is God who creates and

sustains it all. If God has such dominion over all of this, if God manages all these heavenly bodies and worlds, don't you think God can manage your situation? Don't you know Real Power when you see it? Here is the good news, **“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.”** The Lord doesn't run out of energy, intelligence, or ability. God doesn't take a day off, Certainly, God knows what is happening to his people and has the power to deliver the Israelites from their captors and do far more.

## II. SHARES POWER

When it comes to the power of God, I'm convinced we don't understand it. Part of the confusion is we think dominion and domination mean the same thing. Episcopal priest **Stephanie Spellers** writes, “When you see cultures based on White supremacy, misogyny, environmental exploitation, consumerism, oppression, and domination, you are actually seeing the fallout from self-centrism. Entire systems, institutions, and societies are fully capable of this sin, as when a group places itself at the center and expects the rest of humanity and creation to support its singular prosperity.

There is no possibility for right relationships if one powerful group protects and sustains itself over *and against* all others. From there, it's just too easy to construct binaries and hierarchies of human existence. Our group is good; all of you are bad. Our group belongs on top; we

have to keep you low. Our group owns these resources and knows the best way to use them; you will only receive what we give you. Other members of the human family become objects and tools to be acquired, controlled, used, and discarded.”

The nature of God in the first creation story isn't God dominating and forcing the world into a certain mold. It is *“Let there be light.”* It's a permission-giving power. It's such a fascinating phrase: *“Let there be light.”* And also *“Let there be land, let there be sea, let there be crawling creatures, let there be fish, let there be humans.”* It's permission-giving rather than a domination. Then when human beings are made in the image of God, and God says, “You can have dominion,” we would expect it should be the same kind of gentle presence rather than a dominating, controlling, exploiting presence. It's not *“Let there be exploitation.”*

Isaiah said, **“He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless.”** One of the amazing attributes of God his God's willingness to share power, especially with those in need of it. God's power is the power that brings life, renewal, healing, freedom, forgiveness, hope, peace, and love. God's power brings the blessings of strength to rise up, to face hardship, to gain wisdom, to heal, and to begin again. That is a very different power than the often-destructive ways we gain and use power. Real power is not Zeus wielding lightning bolts to keep us all in

line, but rather a God whose suffering on a cross whose power no kingdom can stand against.

### III. TAPPING IN

The million-dollar question is, how do we tap into this permission and life-giving power? Isaiah writes, “...**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 key is we are **to wait for the Lord**. Waiting is not one of our favorite things. We want God to hear our cries and act instantly in our favor. We want God to be a genie in the bottle whose magic can make all the ills of life go away. But God doesn't usually work that way. Besides, the kind of waiting Isaiah speaks about isn't a sitting around in the doctor's office kind of waiting.

This is the kind of waiting of children whose parents have told them they are going to Disney World at the end of the week. The children are so excited they can hardly focus on their schoolwork. They are marking the days off on the calendar. They tell all their friends about the upcoming adventure and the night before they leave, they can hardly sleep. These children are counting on this trip because they trust the word of their parents.

That's the kind of waiting Isaiah is talking about. It's a singled minded trust in God who is creating a new possibility and future for us.

So, we wait with eager longing and hope. It is not because we got it all figured out, not because we got in all together, not because we haven't felt weary and faint, not because we haven't been passed over, ignored, not because we don't hurt anymore, not because we don't have scars, not because we haven't sinned or made bad choices, or were mistaken, or been abused or abandoned, in fact, denying these things probably keep us imprisoned.

Chief White Eagle **“When you are in doubt, be still, and wait. When doubt no longer exists for you, go forward with courage. So long as mists envelop you, be still; be still until the sunlight pours through and dispels the mists as it surely will, then act with courage.”**

We tap into the life-giving power of God when we trust in that real power enough to walk forward in courage, especially when there doesn't seem to be any reason to trust. Real faith empowers us to walk through the messes of life trusting God will sustain us and bring us out on the other side. There, by the power of God, a new life awaits. Amen.



# First Presbyterian Church in Hawley

## Sunday, February 4, 2024

### Second Scripture Lesson

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#### Isaiah 40:21-31

<sup>21</sup>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? <sup>22</sup>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; <sup>23</sup>who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. <sup>24</sup>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. <sup>25</sup>To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One. <sup>26</sup>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.

<sup>27</sup>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"? <sup>28</sup>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. <sup>29</sup>He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. <sup>30</sup>Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; <sup>31</sup>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 is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be To God.**