

On Not Fainting
February 7, 2021
Maple Grove UMC
Rev. Patricia Wagner

We are going to hear two powerful poetic meditations on the human condition. One was written by Rev. Mr. Thomas A. Dorsey, whose young wife Hetty died in childbirth and their child soon after. It was 1932, and Thomas was 33 years old. He was lost in grief, some days later, he found himself at a piano and his hands found the melody of an old hymn by George Allen, *Must Jesus bear the cross alone*, and the spirit led him to words that eased his heart and would ease the heart of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, who grew up with this song in his daddy's church, and who asked Mahalia Jackson to sing it at rallies, and on the phone when he needed comfort. The last words he spoke on that balcony in Memphis on April 4, 1968, was a request that *Precious Lord, Take My Hand* be sung at the church that night.

But before that, we are going to hear from the 40th chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, who is speaking to the Hebrew people, in the 8th Century BC, and I want you to listen to these words and see where you hear their stories connect and how they connect with yours.

Isaiah 40: 21-31

²¹ *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?

²² *It is God 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;

²³ *who brings princes to naught,*

and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.

²⁴ *Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,*

scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,

when the Holy one blows upon them, and they wither,

and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

²⁵ To whom then will you compare me,
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.

²⁶ Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these?
The one who brings out their host and numbers them,
calling them all by name; because the Lord is great in strength,
mighty in power, not one is missing.

²⁷ 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”?

²⁸ Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
who does not faint or grow weary;
and whose understanding is unsearchable.

²⁹ The Holy One 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.

"Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, help me stand, I am tired, I am weak, I am worn."

Did you hear the way, that hymn echoes the passage from Isaiah? The prophet repeats two words 3 times: "weary" and "faint,"

People have always been faint and weary, it seems. Thomas Dorsey, Martin King, the Hebrew people sent into exile in Babylon, which is going to last decades. No wonder they are faint and weary.

I've been thinking about the million mothers in America who had to leave their jobs to care for their children, and they are reporting that even their toddlers are stressed out.

Our backs are aching. It's hard to sleep. We've lost people we love, relationships are strained and the nations, not just ours. Every nation is uneasy.

And we may all be thinking, everyone one of us on this earth as Isaiah says the Hebrew people do: *My way is hidden from the Lord.*

My life is not visible to God. We are just too small, too human to matter

One day, sure, we will enter into glory, and we'll be in God's presence but for now we are too far away for God to reach us.

And its too much - we grow weary and faint.

My most memorable faint happened when I went back to visit my first mission site in Cotabato, a very poor Muslim community in the Southern Philippines.

I stayed that night at the home of a friend, Mohammed, His wife, Isa, had died from TB the year before, his children were hungry, and they wolfed down the candy I'd brought.

That night the rain beat down like a curse and I awoke to water coming in on my bed. And thought, all these years of hard work and he doesn't have money to fix his roof or to feed his children.

The next morning, I slogged my way to the market and came to a stall where women were selling homemade cloth when and my head suddenly grew heavy and I blacked out, right into a colorful stack of cloth.

I became conscious of a dozen hands massaging my head, neck hands and back. Reviving me and Samin, the quiet street sweeper, took me to get a cup of strong coffee and stayed with me until I was alright.

We can be overcome by life. The Hebrew people were, as Thomas Dorsey was, as those moms and most of us on the planet are these days.

But... *"Have you not known, Have you not heard,* says Isaiah.

The Lord is out there, yes, in the remote and beautiful boundlessness.

But God is right here, too, equally transcendent and imminent. In the stars that entrance you, in the music that inspires you, and in the hands that revive you.

And because the Lord is great in strength, mighty in power, says Isaiah, *not one is missing.*

Not one is missing, not those we've lost to death, not those we've forgotten in poverty or oppression or stress, and not you.

Have you not known, have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

This world, including us, including you, and those you don't like, and don't know, belong to God.

You may grow faint and weary, but, says, Isaiah, God does not faint or grow weary. Never, ever, ever.

And that loving energy is reaching out to us all the times, reminding us that we don't have to power our way through by our own steam. That we are to surrender our sense of control so we can receive what we need from God.

And if we do, if we do, says Isaiah:

²⁹ *The Holy One 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.*

Amen.