**“Strength from the Lord”**

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Psalm 91:1-12

Isaiah 40:21-31

1 Corinthians 9:16-27

Mark 1:29-39

 Epiphany 5

From, again, Isaiah 40: “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 to him who has no might He increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they that 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.”

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord, and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Bridge

I included into your bulletins (or, for you at home, it’s an available file sent to you through email or on our website or facebook page where the link to this service is) a print of a painting done by Danish artist Carl Bloch. Perched above the altar in a church in Sweden, this image is displayed that he called “Christus **Consolator**”. “Christus” is Christ, and “**Consolator**” is a no-longer used word that means “**one who consoles**”. “Consolation” is the continuing word that we use from it today, and it’s synonymous (almost directly) with the word “**loser**” (we’ve all heard of a “consolation prize”). Our text from Isaiah calls such (quote**) “losers in need of consolation from a Consolator**” the “**faint**” and the “**weary**”.

I remember a commercial that aired when I was young where a dad was suggested consoling his son with **Life Savers** after a hockey game. The goalie who’d let the puck slip past him for the other teams winning goal got offered a mint, and the son asked for the “**whole roll**”. The people (in the painting that I provided) who’re clinging to the risen Jesus, look like they need **more than a roll of mints**. A prisoner in chains is looking for relief from his sins. A cripple has seemingly lost his will to live. A man poor and skinny wonders where he can find hope. A widow huddles beneath the fold of Christ’s garment. An orphan looks out at us, forlorn. A doubting-Thomas-type wrestles with his skepticism. None of the figures in the painting really are biblical characters in particular, but all **represent** countless coming to “Christus Consolator”. Each has heard from Jesus (and believes and has hope in His Words): “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Text

It’s appropriate that this painting hangs over a church altar, because **there** (**there more than any place else whether our senses pick up on it or not**) we find the risen “Christus Consolator” / Jesus giving the strength promised to the “faint” and “weary” who “wait” (or “hope”, the same word) in Him. He gives His risen life in His body and blood … and He gives that to believers as **food** and **nourishment** and **healing** and **rest** and **security** and **safety** and **salvation** and **forgiveness** and **Heaven on earth** for, both, **soul and body**. Jesus risen and ascended can do everywhere such the more than what He could do locally (as our Gospel account tells us of). And if it were **only that**, people flocked to Him. It being **much the more**, **to Whom else could we flock?**

The Isaiah text wonders if everyone has been paying attention. “Do you not know?”, it asks. “Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is He (God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) 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 dwell in, who brings princes to nothing and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. ‘To whom will you compare Me, that I should be like him?’ Says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of His might, and because He is strong in power not one is missing. Have you not known? Have you not heard?”

You know, the only **downside** to all of this is if one **hasn’t** “known” or **hasn’t** “listened to”, so “heard”, so **doesn’t** “hope” or “wait” upon the One so caring of His “hosts” that He knows their “number” and calls them by “name”.

Jesus bent over backward to heal those who came to Him (hoped in Him). He took the hand of Simon Peter’s ill mother-in-law and “lifted her up”, “fever leaving her”, He healed the sick brought that house’s door and cast out demons, He (in the humble form of humanity that **tires**, **tired yet gave of His even humbled strength in His earthly time**). And resuming His glory since the resurrection, He **does all of those things daily** in ways that the world fails to notice or appreciate … **because He can and has always wanted to, and has done**.

Paul’s letter about “**being all things to all people**, to **win some**” reflects what’s **always been God’s approach**. Changing not, but lowering Himself always to **serve for humanity’s Good in ways that only He knows, incarnate to die upon a cross in crucifixion, preaching every place where He could that** “**the Kingdom of Heaven was** **at hand in Him and His sacrifice for sin**; **repent and believe the Gospel!**”

Application

You have but one thing to do in this generous thing that God does: “hope” and “wait”. You know, people who did not come to Jesus were not healed, nor gained (in the same way) from His nearness. “Hoping” and “waiting” upon Him means coming and repenting and believing Him, and stationing oneself beneath His very-much-outstretched arms. The sick “losers” of The Church know that as we huddle together as in a doctor’s “Waiting Room”, comparing ills and sins and frustrations and weaknesses and frailties and losses and insecurities, “**Waiting** Rooms” get their name from the ultimate Doctor’s Office expressed on the sides of ambulances as **the place of Christ and Him crucified** in that serpent symbol wrapped to a stanchion (remember the account of the Children of Israel plagued but healed by, simply, a “**waiting**” and “**hopefully trusting**” **look** upon that **cruciform Sight**).

**Two postures not unrelated** (and God made sure that these two images would be **indelibly known as the same**) are the outstretched arms of Jesus in, really, two identically-healing contexts. That **one pictured in the painting** invites the needful under **those arms (there to stay)**. **A cross**, stretching arms by nails and a cross-bar, beg sinners under **those arms (there never to really leave behind or forget)**.

**Communion rails** drag us under **both**. **Its preaching** is of **God’s Kingdom “at hand”**, then **gives what it announces**. If there is **one thing** Satan smiles about (among the **many things**) during this time of COVID’s fear, it’s the **keeping people distant from under the Lord’s consoling arms of this fortifying Sacrament of the Altar**. Where there’s a **will**, there’s always a **way**, and sometimes that “**way**” is a **private setting for “consolation” (remember Private Communion as always an emergency offer from your pastors)**.

Satan seems to be **dragging on** this distancing exercise that he’s underway with, so I wanted you to have this painting to give you visual for all that’s “**at stake**” as this (quote) “Pandemic” does its **damage beyond just physical health**.

One way or another, **do not let him (Satan) win the small battles that can affect the bigger war**. “**Keep** Your family the Church, Lord, continually in the true faith, that **relying on the hope of Your heavenly grace**, we may ever **be defended by Your mighty power**, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. In +Jesus’ name. Amen.”