

Isaiah 40:21-31

40:21 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?

40:22 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;

40:23 who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.

40:24 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.

40:25 To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One.

40:26 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.

40:27 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"?

40:28 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.

40:29 He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.

40:30 Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;

40:31 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.

Mark 1:29-39

1:29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

1:30 Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once.

1:31 He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

1:32 That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.

1:33 And the whole city was gathered around the door.

1:34 And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

1:35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

1:36 And Simon and his companions hunted for him.

1:37 When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you."

1:38 He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do."

1:39 And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

“Have You Heard”
Lisa Durkee Abbott
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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

One of the best things about the social media app Facebook for me has been the opportunity to be in touch with friends from around the world, and in real time. Knowing that one of the things that can get the word out about our church is to share the link to our Facebook page, I spent a bit of time virtually “inviting friends” to “like” our page. It has been wonderful to see activity on it since then, and I do hope that some of my more geographically close friends will choose to join us, even in person someday. After having thought last week about the roadside shrine story in India, I guess I shouldn’t have been surprised that more than one friend from my time there has joined us in Facebook solidarity. My friend and former colleague Eva-Karin let me know she will join us in worship this morning—from Sweden. So, we now have two members Zooming in from hours ahead. This kind of connection may be a gift from the pandemic that we continue to welcome long after there are no fears for our health. I’m sure that thinking about her

and others is the reason that I again found my thoughts drifting to India while studying the texts for today.

My family connection to India began in 1914, but it is not my family's story that I want to share this morning. You can ask me about that in person some time. The more astounding story is about a young girl named Ida Scudder, whose parents were medical missionaries to India through the Reformed Church in America. To be sure that I got all the details of the story correct, I Googled her name and "the three knocks," which is how those who continue her legacy still refer to what we may name her call to serve.

"While in India, Ida found herself alone at her home in Tindivanam one evening because her father had gone out on a medical call. In the silence of the evening, she heard a knock on the door. It was a high caste gentleman. His wife was very sick because of a difficult childbirth and he requested Ida to come and help. Ida suggested that her father would attend to the problem when he returned since she was not a doctor. The man refused to allow a man to treat his wife. He said, "She had better die than have anything like that happen." Ida pleaded with the man but he simply refused and walked away. That very night, two more men knocked on the door, one after the other, requesting her to come to their home and help their wives who were having difficulty in child birth. In both cases, the men refused to have her father touch or even see the face of their wives. And so they walked away. Ida Scudder could not sleep that night - very close to where she stayed, three young women were dying simply because there was no woman doctor to help them. Early the next morning, she heard drum-beats signaling the death of one of the women. She soon came to know that all three women had died in the night. To young Ida Scudder, this was an epiphany, a clear call from God. She made a promise to her parents to study medicine and come back to care for the women of India. She kept her promise, went back to the U.S.A. and started her medical studies. This was at a time when a woman studying medicine was a rarity. Male students were often patronizing or derisive in their attitude and in one instance a senior doctor even advised her to cut off her hair, dress like a man and study medicine. She went on to complete her course, graduating from Cornell Medical College, New York City in 1899.¹ On January 1st 1900, Ida Scudder set foot in Vellore once again, this time as a qualified doctor to begin what would become a lifetime of service to her adopted country of India"

<https://cmijournal.files.wordpress.com/2016/08/65-66-ida-scudder.pdf>).

After seeing the extraordinary work that is done in Vellore, not only on the grounds of the hospital complex, but also in extensive outreach into the villages

that surround the city, my mother was and now I am on the U.S. foundation board that supports the teaching hospital. It has been a fascinating window into far more than what can be achieved in non-profit fund raising. My own faith is uplifted every time that I gather with the doctors and nurses who have been educated there and who serve in healing ministries, *because that is the way they know to be Jesus' hands and feet*. For the nurses and doctors educated under the legacy of Dr. Ida Scudder, stories about Jesus' healing are not meant to be symbolic tales of divine strength, but invitation to respond to the needs of this world. I know that I often wonder what one small voice can say, or what one small person can do. I speak for myself, and I imagine for some of you as well, that too often even today, we run from what frightens us when we might step forward in faith and in action.

In this morning's Gospel lesson and throughout the book of Mark, we hear about a strong immediacy in Jesus' mission throughout Galilee. That sounds pretty good to me; I want immediate healing for my body and soul and for all of yours. I want the Kingdom of God now, and I sometimes want that to happen with or without my help. I guess it isn't so surprising either, then, that we can get very uncomfortable when our answers to medical and other problems don't come quickly. Healing doesn't always happen this way, though, and we may want to look to Isaiah for what is also a realistic understanding of the way that God enters our lives in times of ill-health and other difficulty.

28 Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.

29 He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.

30 Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;

Do you hear what I hear in this passage? *God it is* who does not grow tired or weary, whereas even young people grow tired and fall. This is not the last word, however. "31 but they who wait upon the LORD
will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.”

If we wonder how immediately God works the wonders of this world, we need only look to the still changing creation to know that some movements are beyond our understanding. Some time periods are beyond our ken. To think about waiting for healing in this way could bring us down, way down. To wait doesn't always mean to live in idle expectancy. As Lindy Smith points out, “Wait can have a second meaning. People wait on tables, for example. Is it possible that waiting on the Lord is more than just passing time? Is waiting on the Lord also being open and available to the will of God?” George Bernard Shaw once wrote, “This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.” This last aspect of Shaw's note doesn't accurately reflect much of waiting time, though. It doesn't adequately reflect the difficulties that some people face with *humorous* strength, even when things are out of their control.

Our passage from Isaiah was written when the people of Israel were in exile in Babylon. What many kinds of ailments and misery must have been present there? Imagine for a moment, though, that these words refer instead to the exiles of our own time: soldiers on duty, their husbands, wives and families; those lost in ill health without knowing the cause or the cure. Maybe in these current circumstances active faith truly is the answer to immediate need. Trusting in Jesus' healing presence of wholeness and in that power to transform our lives can fill even the loneliest with hope. Healing, you see, isn't always a matter of bodily strength. Healing is so often a matter of acceptance and wholeness. Other exiles in our midst are still those who suffer from inexplicable and frightening disease. Where might the hope lie for a young man suffering from AIDS, or for a young child bitten by a malaria infected mosquito in Zimbabwe? I don't believe that our healing is only to take place sometime later. So much of Jesus' healing ministry was to people whose illnesses kept them on the fringe, misunderstood and sometimes unloved. The possessed, the lepers, the mothers-in-law (yes, this is not

just a joke, because women really were relegated to a secondary position) all were those who needed community relief.

Not all of us are doctors, of course, and thinking about those in need closer to home makes me excited to think of our renewed commitment with the Simmering Pot. Our feeding hungry people and our creating space for community conversation and support is a part of our mission. I have found myself wondering how Dr. Ida might respond, or maybe even how my grandfather might have responded. What do we dare, when we trust in the Lord. I want to invite you to remember the question the prophet Isaiah asked, but in a different way. *Have you heard?* It's good news! Today is always our opportunity to be the wind under people's wings, or the meal to end their hunger. Now is the time to hear what we may do when we step forward in faith.

Let us pray: Merciful and powerful God, please show us the ways in which we can reach out to others to bring them to wholeness; to inclusion and to healing. Help us to be a community of action and acceptance; of loving and of grace. In the name of our Savior, the healer Jesus Christ. Amen.