

Isaiah 40:21-31  
 Psalm 147:1-11, 20c  
 1 Corinthians 9:16-23  
 Mark 1:29-39

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Let us pray. Jesus, your touch heals. Your presence gives hope. Help us be your touch in our world, so that all those we meet and touch have hope. We pray these things in your holy name. Amen

\*The story is told of a woman in Tennessee whose life reminds others that God reigns ... that God has never forgotten you ... that our worries disappear when we trust God – not that all of the PROBLEMS disappear, but that the WORRIES disappear ...

Her name is Margaret. She would be about 103 now, if she were still living. She used to hike ten or fifteen miles every day. She is a legend in the Smoky Mountains. Pastor Bill Carl talks about times when he hiked alongside her. He says, *“It was always a joy to hike with Margaret, because she knew every turn and every trail and every plant and tree by its Latin and colloquial name.”*

His first trip up Mt. LeConte was Margaret’s 75<sup>th</sup> trip; his second trip up was her 125<sup>th</sup>; his third trip up was her

500<sup>th</sup>. When Margaret finally stopped hiking, she had climbed Mt. Leconte more than 700 times.

Again Pastor Bill says, *“Once when we were hiking together, we came upon what Margaret described as the most unrelenting two-mile ridge in the whole area – two miles up with no break, and this was after a hard six miles on a very hot day. I like to hike in spurts, so I said, ‘See you later, Margaret,’ and took off in my usual fashion and got way ahead of her.*

*“At some point I found myself lying flat on my back in half delirium. A blurred Margaret passed at her steady pace. I can still hear the click-click of her cane and with no pity at all in her voice, she said, ‘One more mile to go, Bill. I’ll see you at the top!’ And so she did, arriving well ahead of me without stopping once.”*

Pastor Bill adds, *“Not long after that, Margaret’s husband died of cancer, but because of her daily walk with God their last few hours were spent not in sadness or remorse, but in joy and celebration ... her face is fixed on Christ, her step is steady and sure, and she knows the meaning of Isaiah’s words:*

*Even youths will faint and be weary,  
 and the young will fall exhausted;  
 but those who wait for the Lord shall  
 renew their strength,*

*they shall mount up with wings as eagles,  
they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint.”*

“Her face is fixed on Christ, her step is steady and sure.”

Margaret knew where true strength came from. She knew that endurance came from a steady, even pace, focused on the goal.

Such is our walk of faith ... putting one foot in front of the other. It is a walk of endurance at times. There are days when a 2-mile, uphill hike would look like a piece of cake. But the strength that keeps us going in our walk of faith is not OUR strength – it is GOD’S strength.

Too often, we DO trust in ourselves – our own strength – and we forget to trust in God. We trust in what we can see – ourselves and our power – and we fail to trust in what we cannot see – God and God’s strength.

Bill trusted in his own youthful strength ... and Margaret left him in the dust ... she trusted in the strength of the one who created her, she trusted in the one who wisely guided her to keep a steady pace, to curb any impatience about getting to the top ... the one who created every tree and flower that Margaret knew so well – could call by name ... she knew very

well where her strength would come from.

So did the apostle Paul. He did not trust in his own power to proclaim the Gospel ... he trusted in GOD’S ability for the message to be spread through him. “I cannot make this proclamation of my own accord – my own will. No! This is God’s Gospel. God has entrusted me with a call and a commission. This is God’s work, not mine.”

Perhaps this is why the work that Paul did – or the work that God did through Paul’s life – is so well known. Because God’s power is so much greater than anything we humans can do. Paul followed the call, God’s strength – God’s power – was behind all of the work.

Simon’s Mother-in-Law had no strength, either. She had no power. She was so ill with a fever that she couldn’t even crawl out of bed! She couldn’t be the person she wanted to be – she couldn’t make a meal for her family – she was alienated from those who were her community ... because she was sick ... weak ... powerless ...

But she trusted in Jesus and Jesus’ power. Jesus restored her and because she relied upon Jesus’ healing power – Jesus’ strength – she was returned to her family, returned to her position within her community, re-established

as the woman she wanted to be, and she began to serve the others.

She is an incredible example of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus! She relied upon HIS strength for her ability to serve others.

That is what disciples do ... they trust in and rely upon GOD'S strength, not their own.

But sometimes – we are more like Pastor Bill. We try to tough it out. We try to get their on our own strength and ability.

Because the power of God is a power that we cannot see with our eyes. It is a strength that we cannot understand. Remember what Isaiah said ...  
 “Our God is the everlasting God, creator of the ends of the earth ... his understanding is unsearchable ...”  
 How can we possibly comprehend such a God?!

But such a God does not faint or grow weary.  
 Such a God gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless.

This is strength and power that is all about endurance for the long haul ... this is strength for the whole journey of life ... as we keep our eyes fixed on the goal we receive this strength and power ... as we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus himself, God blesses us with the

endurance and hope that we need ... even in the darkest of times.

This is the sort of confidence that Margaret had. Trusting in the steady, even pace of her hikes ... trusting in the strength of her Lord ... she continued to hike those hills, even as her body continued to age ... she continued to live with joy, even as she said good-bye to her beloved husband.

This is the sort of confidence that WE can have. We keep our eyes on Jesus and we keep walking along the path of faith. And this isn't something we have to do all alone.

We walk together on this road – holding each other's hands, supporting one another, sharing God's presence with those around us.

Of course, there are times when we or those around us, get overly excited and take off without our friends in faith. And sometimes we wind up flat on our back – exhausted from the work that we took on by ourselves ... and sometimes we need someone to help us get back on our feet ... and sometimes we need someone like Margaret who gives us a little ribbing – or a big nudge and a little kick in the pants – to remind us that we can't do this on our own. We need to stick together and rely upon God's strength.

Because God's strength is the power that is our strength. And God's power is all the hope that we have for the future! It is a strength far beyond anything we can generate on our own, and it is a hope that cannot be overcome by anything the world or life in this world can throw at us.

When we trust in God ... we continue to walk through the toughest of times ... even those 2-mile-long, steep, uphill paths ... the ones that have no breaks or places to rest ... and our steps are steady and even, because we give our worries over to God. We don't need to carry the burden of worry or anxiety. We keep walking ... together ... slow and steady ... knowing that God is at the top of the mountain ... and God's strength will get us there, too.

God's touch doesn't suddenly make the path a simple, smooth roadway – our problems don't disappear instantaneously. But our worries can. When we put those worries into God's hands, we can continue to work with those around us and walk side-by-side in God's ways ... and God will give us the strength to keep going.

Think about a rough patch that you have gone through – maybe recently, maybe a long time ago. Think about the love you received from those around you ... Can you see how God was present in the midst of that

difficult time – through those people who brought you love and gave you support?

That is us ... that is our community ... that is where WE as the people of God – as the disciples of Jesus – WE are called to continue to walk this path together and to support one another. Keeping our eyes on Jesus – keeping our steps slow and steady – keeping up an even pace – putting one faithful foot in front of the other ...

And God gives us this strength and this hope and we will reach the top of the mountain ... and we will see God face-to-face.

Amen. Let it be so.

\*Source for this story is *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Volume 1, pp. 317 & 319. Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.