

Sermon for Online Service: Pott Shrigley 14 June 2020. Rev David Swales

Isaiah 40.12-14,27-31 *Soar, Run, Walk*

Like many people, I love walking. And I'm blessed to live in a place where walking is always a joy and a pleasure. I'm grateful for that – and also that I'm fit and healthy enough to be able to do it.

Occasionally, I will treat myself to a longer – or, rather, higher – walk; climbing up White Nancy, or the Nab, or up towards Charles Head. Those steep inclines are punishing – but the view from the top is more than worth it: on a clear day you can see for miles, westwards towards the Cheshire Plain, eastwards into the Peak District; a glimpse of the majesty of the Creator, of Eternity itself. Most days, I'll take a shorter walk with our dog, Belle. I tend to do those walks as fast as I can – a kind of 'walking sprint'; I enjoy the feeling of energy, of pushing myself and getting tired.

And sometimes, I go for a long walk: a full day's hike – or even a walking holiday covering many miles over a number of days. I might be able to power along the footpaths of Pott Shrigley on my short walks, but on those longer ones I can only manage a steady plod; otherwise, I can't keep going for the whole distance.

In our reading, there was a picture of these different kinds of travelling. The soaring flight, rising up high; the sprinting run; and the plodding walk:

Those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength.

They will rise on wings like eagles;

they will run and not be weary;

they will walk and not grow faint.

It's very familiar, of course, to compare the Christian life with the act of travelling. We often speak of our 'journey of faith'; walking with Jesus throughout our lives. And any authentic 'journey of faith' is bound to include a variety of different modes of travel.

There will be those times when you are soaring on eagle's wings. Strangely, this can come at the most unexpected times. Over the years, so many people have told me that it was when things were really tough – when they were weak, or broken, and unable to go on – that they found themselves....strengthened, yes, but, more than that, *carried* by the Lord; even lifted high up – *rising on wings like eagles* – and given that glimpse of God's glory, just when they most needed it.

For most people, though, those ‘eagles’ wings moments’ will not be an everyday part of the faith journey. More common, perhaps, will be those times when we’re not exactly at the *end* of our resources – but they feel stretched. We’re under pressure; there’s so much to be done; keeping going is hard work. This, if you like, is the sprint – the run. The thing about running for most of us is that, even if we can keep it up for a short time, we soon grow tired and can’t go on. Again, these words of Isaiah promise the strength we need to go on when the going is tough: *they will run and not be weary*.

But there’s a danger here. God’s promise of the strength we need is not an invitation to take on unrealistic amounts of pressure, based on the assurance that God will give us the strength to cope. For many of us, that has become quite a puzzle in recent months; the familiar routines, the checks and balances have been removed, some tasks and pressures are gone, yes, but new and strange ones have come in their place. God *will* give us the strength we need – but we should also ask him for wisdom about what we should – and shouldn’t – take on.

So, there’ll be those precious moments where with God we soar with eagles’ wings; more frequently we’ll find the strength we need when we’re forced to keep going at a fast pace; but most common of all is the last mode of travel: the daily plod; *‘They will walk, and not grow faint’*.

Now, I hear you say; eagles wings? Great! How wonderful to have those moments when we are lifted up to the heavens. Strength to keep running? Fantastic! What a wonderful promise that the Lord will keep us strong. But walking? The daily plod? Just keeping going? That’s not very exciting....

Far from that! I think it’s great news that God is, more than anything, with us in the the ordinary, everyday times. A faith which doesn’t have any impact on our everyday life – a God who only shows up on special occasions, or in moments of dire need; that’s not the faith, not the God, of the Bible.

Isaiah’s promise is that God is with us for the long haul. And he calls us to be with him for the long-term, too. And to let his transforming presence infuse every aspect of that journey of faith: from those soaring moments, through testing times, to those every day situations where we....just keep going.