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Isaiah 40:21-31

Mark 1:29-39

## GOSPEL PASSION

Do you think there is going to be a bit of passion flowing in Philly today? When before today would there have been as much energy and excitement? When Villanova won the NCAA men's basketball tournament two years ago? When the Phillies last won the World Series ten years ago? When the 76er's last won a championship in 1983? When the Flyers last won a Stanley Cup in 1975? Perhaps we'd have to go back to the celebration that came at the end of World War II or to the day when the Declaration of Independence was first read and celebrated to match what will be today's passion in the city of brotherly love. There is a lot of excitement about the good news of the home team. And what will tomorrow look like? Well, that depends on how well Nick Foles and Fletcher Cox and twenty other guys play tonight.

It's a bit of fun for there to be something that unites and excites Philadelphians. But the energy will die down at some point – either when the Patriots eke out an ill-gotten win or sometime after the parade down Broad Street finishes on Tuesday. It actually wouldn't be healthy for there to be an ultra-high dose of adrenalin energizing our bodies day after day. Even energizer bunnies need to slow down now and then.

There was a lot of energy in the small fishing town of Capernaum on that Sabbath day and the next morning described in our gospel account from Mark. We heard last Sunday about Jesus being in that town's synagogue on the Sabbath, where he was confronted by and then healed someone dominated by an unclean spirit. Our reading from Mark's account for today picks up right there. After being in the synagogue, Jesus went over to Simon and Andrew's house, where he finds out that Simon's wife's mother is in bed with a fever. He goes to her, takes her by the hand, and helps her get up out of bed. We're told that her fever was then gone,

and she felt good enough to immediately serve Jesus and his followers whatever food or drink they needed. There were the limitations on the amount of work anyone could do on the Sabbath, but as the sun set on that Saturday evening, people who had gotten wind of the news about Jesus' healing powers began bringing all who were sick or who were understood to be possessed by evil spirits to Simon's door. Can you imagine the excitement as person after person was healed of their infirmities? It didn't matter whether they were poor or rich, whether their illness left them ritually impure or not, Jesus helped them know in their minds and in their bodies that God wanted wholeness for them. Mark tells us the whole city was gathered around the door. Imagine the energy and the excitement! At some point, who knows what time, the door was finally closed, and Jesus probably fell into bed after a very full day.

I heard of a worship service recently where one of the psalms that talked about the Lord being exalted was to be read. But the person who was reading the passage, perhaps with a bit of nervousness, said the Lord was 'exhausted,' instead of 'exalted.' I have to imagine that our Lord Jesus was exhausted that night, even after he had been exalted for his healing powers. That makes me wonder how Jesus kept going, even after facing wave after wave of human brokenness and need. And I wonder that because we as followers of Jesus also face unmet needs just outside our doors. How do we keep ourselves energized enough to keep going, seeking to address what we have the capacity to address? After all of the destructive hurricanes from last fall, Harvey hitting Texas, Irma hitting Florida, Maria hitting Puerto Rico, along with the California wildfires that were among the worst we have known, the experience of compassion fatigue in terms of the charitable response got mentioned quite a bit.

Referring to imagery from our reading from Isaiah, there will be times even as we face challenges just beyond the door, when we will be flying high, as if we had the wings of eagles. There will be other times when we have a level of energy to run hither and yon. But there will be those times when we might find it a challenge to even put one foot in front of another, when we are hoping to move forward even slowly, walking without fainting in our tracks. The passage from Isaiah gives encouragement for God's people to wait for the Lord for their strength to move

forward, but it doesn't say that all of them will be able to soar as if flying or will be able to run without weariness all of the time. No, it says there are times that even with our strength renewed by the Lord, that we will only be able to walk without fainting.

I have to imagine, that Jesus, human as he was, did not always move forward with unrelenting energy 100% of the time. Neither do we! But after Jesus had a tremendously busy day in addressing human need, Mark tells us that he got up well before sunrise and went out by himself to pray. He tended to his own spiritual needs. In prayer, in reliance upon God, he was reminded of his purpose and he was gifted with the power to live that purpose out. While Jesus is still out praying, his followers hunt him down and urge him to come back to town, saying, "Everyone is searching for you!" Perhaps the townspeople wanted to give him a parade down Broad Street in Capernaum. But instead of pursuing such fame, Jesus had been given the strength and direction to pursue God's purpose for him and for the people not only of that town, but throughout the whole region of Galilee. So he told his followers, "Let's go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also, for that is what I came out to do." So he went on proclaiming God's goodness and love in word and in deed throughout the land. God sustained him for that ministry, by day and by night.

The same God who empowered Jesus' ministry can empower ours. There were words from our Isaiah passage that we chanted earlier: "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is everlasting. God created the earth! Have you not known? Have you not heard? God does not grow faint, God is mystery. Have you not known? Have you not heard? God strengthens the powerless. Have you not known? Have you not heard?" We will not move at breakneck speed all of the time, but God can fill us with the passion of a gospel that is good not just for the locals, but for all people. It is a message and a reality that could make anyplace a city of brotherly and sisterly love. Getting guidance and power from God, let's keep moving forward, supported by a congregational home team, doing what we are called to do, just beyond our door and wherever we are led to go.