

## *You Raise Me Up*

In the part of the lectionary reading from Isaiah 40 that we didn't read together earlier, the prophet weaves with vivid threads a poetic tapestry of an all-powerful Creator God, who *"marked off the heavens"* – and created the starry host, *"calling them by name"*. Human beings are as *"grasshoppers"* – small and insignificant in light of the vast expanse of the universe. Hear Isaiah's words: *"Have you not known? Have you not heard? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is God, 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; who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when God blows upon them, and they wither; and the tempest carries them off like stubble. To whom then will you compare Me, or who is my equal? Says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? The One who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because God is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing."*

Only when we grasp God's greatness and our own insignificance – does a word of hope emerge – that *"those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength"* - God will raise us up with *"wings like eagles"* so that we may carry on with renewed courage.

This truly was a word of hope to the first hearers of this poem – those in exile in Babylon. Captivity was a painful reality for those who had been forced from their homes, scattered as the Temple – the centre of their lives - was laid to waste – refugees from their way of life, their language, their culture, their God. Tired, discouraged and despondent – they conclude *"My way is hidden from the LORD; my right disregarded by my God."* They could have concluded that the gods of Babylon were stronger than their God, or even that God did not exist at all. But their conclusion is even more heart-wrenching – that they are simply *'disregarded'* by God – abandoned in their time of great need. Some of us know what that feels like – when our world falls down around us – and even God seems to have left us in our suffering and grief.

But here is where Isaiah reminds them (and us) that the all-powerful God who created the vast diversity of the universe is also the same Shepherd who gently claims, gathers and carries us – ***particularly*** in our times of need. Paradoxically - the One who is Wholly Other – is also the One who knows us intimately – who calls us by name, and claims us in love. *"Have you not known? Have you not heard?"* Isaiah asks us several times – reminding us of God's promises and actions in the past. In our times of uncertainty, discouragement and doubt – we are urged to *"wait upon the Lord"* – who will surely renew our strength – and raise us up on wings like eagles so that we shall *"run and not be weary; we shall walk and not faint"*.

Where in your life does this word of hope speak to you this morning? Where are the places of uncertainty, confusion, disappointment, hurt? May we offer these in the next few minutes of reflection to the One who *"raises us up"* in love.