

Epiphany 5, Year B 2024
St. Clare's Episcopal Church
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Flying, running, and walking. All ways of getting somewhere you want to go. Flying, walking and running.

We didn't have much occasion to fly when I was very young, except when we moved from Kentucky to Florida. I don't remember much of that flight except walking down the stairs of the plane to greet my father who was waiting for us. The flight I do remember was the one I took when I was about 12 years old. I wanted to visit cousins in Illinois for the sole purpose of seeing snow. We had lived in central Florida since I was 4 and I hadn't seen snow since we left Kentucky. I saved my money so I could buy a plane ticket – I must have asked for money for birthdays and Christmases and done odd jobs for neighbors – I'm not sure how I got money at that age. But I saved it - \$121 is what I remember it costing. My mom and our neighbor took me to the airport and I flew to Chicago, and I did get to see snow. I've been on many, many flights since, but that's the one that stands out to me the most.

Running has never been my thing. In PE I could run well, but I was so tiny that I didn't get anywhere very fast. My college roommate tried to get me to run with her our freshman year. I made it half-way down the street we were to run and let her know that I'd be waiting there for her when she returned. But I have friends who are avid runners and they say that running is exhilarating for them.

Flying, running and walking. All have a function, ways of getting somewhere you want to go. All three can also bring great joy to people.

Our readings today from Isaiah and Mark tell us about two characteristics of God. Isaiah paints a picture of the God who created the world, a powerful and mighty God, in charge of the universe and all that is in it. "Have you not heard? Have you not seen?" asks God. God is the one who created all that is, who has power over the nations, whose breath can wither the powerful. This God can bring about the destruction of nations and uphold nations. This God does not grow weary of us, offers second chances, is a God whose Holiness is above any other claim to holiness, and is a God whose promises are everlasting. This God sees everything that is and has power over everything that is.

Mark shows us a complementary characteristic of God. Mark wants us to know that God's power is also intimate, touching the everyday needs of people both in public, and in the privacy of their homes. In contrast to the God who created the universe, the almightiness of God in Jesus is shown in a steady swell of love in action, always present in the center of everything there is, opening the door to a future that we can't even see or imagine, and bringing hope. Love from a distance only, without the intimacy or nearness that allows for touch, is difficult to know and to trust. So God becomes human to demonstrate love, to demonstrate trustworthiness, and to bring about wholeness in our lives.

Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote a marvelous book about the creeds of the church called Tokens of Trust. I have mentioned it often. Williams' basic thesis is that God is fundamentally trustworthy, and that to say we believe in God is actually a proclamation of trust in God. Williams suggests that we are called to "pray, to trust and to live with integrity before God, to live 'holy' lives, in such a way as to leave the door open, to let things come together so that love can come through."

God became one of us in order to show us how to live fully human lives, and part of living a fully human life is learning to access God's loving action which is always around us. I think this is why Jesus so often leaves the crowds and goes away by himself to pray. He needs to remove himself from the demands around him, to be open to God's creative energy, be filled with the love of God, and renew his purpose.... so that he can be the bearer of healing to the world in a way that we can only hope to learn from his example. In story after story, as in today's healing of Simon's mother-in-law, we see that wherever Jesus is, there is prayer and holiness in unique intensity, and the door to possibilities is open wider than with anyone else.

We, too, can learn to be open to God's creative energy and love, and open our lives to possibilities we can't imagine. There's a promise in Isaiah and Mark that if we can "wait for the Lord" we can be renewed. Jesus waits for the Lord and is renewed through prayer and solitude.

To be still and be filled with God's presence. Does that not give us all the promise that we can fly, we can run, we can walk? Even those whose bodies are young are exhausted by all that's going in the world today. But God promises that those who wait on the Lord "shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

I like this metaphor offered to us by Isaiah. We will mount up with wings like eagles, we will run and not be weary, we will walk and not faint. We aren't born with any of these abilities (especially flying). We learn them. We learn to walk by falling, and falling, and falling and getting up again and again and trying until we master it. And then unless something happens to our ability to walk, we don't give it much thought. It becomes second nature.

The life of faith takes practice and work, too. We practice with prayer, with reading of Scripture and other books, we are in conversation with one another, we worship, we participate. But it's not linear. We, too, stumble and fall down. We can feel like we move closer to God and have some understanding of our relationship with God, and new questions arise. Or we are hurt. Or our prayers seem to go unanswered. But the more we practice, the more we experience that God is trustworthy, the more we come to know that God is always present with us, the better able we are to walk and run.

We are entering Lent in just a week and a half. Ash Wednesday is actually on Valentine's Day this year. Traditional practices of prayer, fasting and giving alms are the church's ancient ways of renewing ourselves during Lent, refocusing our attention on our lives

with God. Lent is a time to examine our lives with God.

Flying, walking, running. Walking and running are skills we develop when we're young and carry us into our older age. But flying, flying would be miraculous for us, and is only available through God's presence in our lives. As we prepare for Lent, I hope you will find new ways to be open to God's creative energy in your life, and let God lift your wings so you can soar. Amen.