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2 November 2020

Dear People of St Stephen's,

"Those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint." Isaiah 40:31

I'm drawn to this passage of scripture as I write, perhaps because all we have been doing for weeks and months is waiting – waiting for the next "phase" in a phased reopening process; waiting for favorite businesses to reopen; waiting for worship services in-person to resume. And, while some of the waiting has diminished, it seems fair to say that we all have some additional waiting to do before things come close to normal.

I'm also very aware these past months have been incredibly challenging for many of us. Our waiting may have been accompanied by feelings of loneliness; anxiety; financial, health, or work struggles; and by much uncertainty.

The Isaiah scripture that began this letter was written to those who were exiled and held captive in Babylon. Their only prospect for hope and deliverance was to be found in God. This scripture is often referenced by those who are in unusual and unfamiliar circumstances of danger, insecurity, or want; by those who look to God for merciful deliverance, intervention, and hope. While we are certainly not captives, there may have been times this year when we felt that way. In many ways, we are uncertain; we are insecure, times are unusual and unfamiliar.

The question is asked, "How do we conduct a stewardship emphasis this year in the midst of all of this waiting?" Here are some things I ask you to consider:

REACH OUT

Use this time we're in to purposefully reach out to fellow parishioners as a way to break isolation and keep the bonds of our church fellowship strong. I encourage you to pick a handful of others in our parish and make it a point to call, text or email them every few weeks just to check in and see how they're doing, or what they might need. This simple act of caring right now can mean the world to others.

Also, seek to invite others to join our faith community. The fact that we're not able to gather in person right now makes it all the easier for people to check us out through our online worship. Think about others in your area – or anywhere in the world! – and ask them join us for worship one Sunday. Follow up with them to see if they'd like to connect again in some way. This is a great way to grow our church family right now.

RENEW

Be sure to take good care of yourself spiritually. In addition to connecting regularly in online worship and coffee hours, etc., make time for prayer and reflection on a regular basis.

And keep the vital ministry and presence of our church in your prayers. Remember that our staff and volunteers are working hard to continue – and even expand! – our serving in this community even during this pandemic.

SERVE

As you're able, continue to offer your volunteer efforts in one of our ministry programs or consider serving in some new way. Worship continues on-line every Sunday and weekdays for Noonday Prayer. Become a Reader, Intercessor, assist with the Altar Guild and others in worship each Sunday, or participate in recording our Noonday Prayer services. Going forward, we will need teams to assist us go-live with our worship services. There is an ever-increasing need for volunteers to help provide food stability as we partner with Teen Feed, and area school programs to feed children in need. You can join n our prayer chain group, with those who provide caring ministry, or perhaps help deliver flowers used in our services to individuals. Other opportunities are waiting for your gifts in ministry.

GIVE

Over the coming weeks, we'll be talking about the ways each of us are called to give, and the opportunity we have to support ministry in and through St. Stephen's. Our congregation is graciously generous and faithful.

Pledge cards are available for your response, and on Sunday, November 29th, we'll celebrate our ingathering of financial commitments. If you're not yet ready to offer your pledge by the date of the ingathering, a member of our Vestry will follow up with you to receive your response.

I ask each of you to use the coming weeks to prayerfully discern what your gift to St. Stephen's will be. Each of us is uniquely blessed with God's abundance in some measure, and as you're able, I invite your thankoffering to God's blessings in your life.

For now, "thank you" in advance for choosing to be a part of the St. Stephen's family by reaching out, renewing, serving and giving. Together, we are God's people living in life-affirming community, and together we look forward to the future God has planned for us.

In Christ,



The Rev. Robert Beicke
Rector