

***Never at a Standstill***

*Psalm 30; Isaiah 40<sup>27-41</sup>13; 2 Timothy 4<sup>1-18</sup>*

*Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. [Isaiah 40<sup>31</sup>]*

Two readings this afternoon - both in reflective mood (very suitable for Lent).

- ✠ Isaiah is encouraging - by looking to God, you will get the strength to carry on: **he gives power to the faint, and strength to the powerless.**
- ✠ Paul is at the end of his life and coming to terms with his imminent execution but is able to say that **the Lord stood by me and gave me strength.**
- ✠ The Psalmist joins in with the perspective that faith only makes sense when you look back on it - the perception that God is angry with us; the sleeplessness; the sense that God is doing something else - all of those can feel very real in the moment, but hindsight helps us see that **[God has] turned my mourning into dancing; you have put off my sackcloth and girded me with gladness.**

It is that experience of faith that gives Paul the faith to look forward to the **crown of righteousness** (the naughty schoolboy in me does wonder what he was going to do with it as he was facing beheading): he says with confidence **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith** and, as is appropriate for a man of faith his almost final written words are a doxology: **To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

That said, we may never aspire to courage in the face of martyrdom. Ours is a much more pedestrian experience.

For us lesser mortals - aspiring to a faith that sustains us - we turn to Isaiah. As a teenager I remember reading Corrie Ten-Boom's book, *In My Father's House*, and her thoughts on this text. For her the text was the wrong way round.

- ✠ Normally, one would expect that the progression would be from walking to running to flying, but here we don't go up the gears but come down them instead.

- ✠ Here Isaiah recognises that there will be times that we feel as if we are flying, on top of the world and close to God. At other times we are going well, but can only manage a run. But the real promise of God to all of us is that we will always be able to put one foot in front of the other - God can always be trusted that we will never come to a standstill!

On this mothering Sunday I look back to my grandmothers - I don't think that they would ever have been recognised as 'high-fliers' but they were examples of steady, persistent faith: faith that made a difference to them and, by their example, to me. We need those inspirational models of simple faith today.