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## *Those Who Wait For The Lord Shall Renew Their Strength*

**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**  
**The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany**

"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 was a small boy when the first Super Bowl was hyped and played, and I remember looking up to those super players. I played football almost every day back in Newnan, Georgia. And every one of us little boys, in those side yards and front yards and back yards, every single one of us, was going to be a football star.

The hype for that first Super Bowl was tremendous. Those were the days of Vince Lombardi and the Green Bay Packers. This was going to be the bowl to decide all bowls. The game would determine the best in the world.

The Super Bowl folks began using Roman numerals to indicate which game it was, and somehow the custom stuck. You know the system: I for one, V for five, X for ten. And tonight, L for fifty. The game tonight will be Super Bowl X-L. XL does not mean extra large; it means forty.

Our country's Super Bowl does remind me of the Romans. It reminds me of the Roman Coliseum games, games of sheer brawn and strength, games which happily seduced people and culture. That's how folks satisfied themselves. Forty years ago, the Rolling Stones were singing "I Can't Get No Satisfaction," and they will still be singing tonight!

A lot has happened in forty years. Some of our great civil rights leaders have come and gone. We've won some wars; we've lost some wars. Our communications systems look nothing like they did forty years ago. Do you remember the telegram? Last Friday, January 27, Western union sent its last telegram ever.

Much has changed in forty years. But we are still trying to find our satisfaction in these games of physical prowess and worldly muscle. We are still trying to find our satisfaction in all sorts of others ways, not just games of physical stamina, but in the latest technology, in the newest Blackberries, in political victories, in the violence of war, maybe in a new president of the Federal Reserve Bank, in the luxury of financial profit.

And into this old world, God still sends a message.

"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."

The world has changed since the days of Isaiah, but the pressures of this world are the same: personal pressures, family pressures, business pressures, international pressures.

President Bush tried to address some of them in his State of the Union address last Tuesday. Newspaper columnists and television analysts tried to address them minutes after the speech. Our Mayor and City Council try to address zoning issues and what size our community's houses ought to be.

But the Church bears witness to something else. Did you know that today is pretty much the middle of the winter? If December 21, the winter solstice is the beginning of winter, and March 25, the Spring Equinox, is the beginning of spring, then today, February 5, is pretty much right in between those dates. Today, and this past week, is the middle of winter.

Usually, we have an ice storm about this time of year. Just ask the chairs of some of our previous Cathedral Antiques Show. This past week can be an icy time.

Our ancestors also knew that this was a bleak time of year. Around forty days after the winter solstice, the Romans carried candles around the city to signal light and warmth during this dreary time. That is probably why, for Christians, the Feast of Candlemas emerged on February 2. We lit candles this past Thursday night, to signal that light was still coming into the world, even though the nights were cold. Candlemas is the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the temple, forty days after Jesus was born. Yes, forty days.

Listen to this. There's an old Christian rhyme that goes like this:

If Candlemas be fair and bright,  
Winter has another flight.  
If Candlemas brings clouds and rain,  
Winter will not come again.

What does that sound like? Right! It sounds like Groundhogs Day. Yes, this bleak week is probably the reason we observe Groundhog's Day around this time of year. We are usually tired of the cold. How much more winter will we have? Let's ask the Groundhog, on February 2. But whether he sees his shadow or not, March 21, the spring equinox, is still six weeks away!

It may be that even the American Super Bowl is meant to be played during this week. We need a pick-me-up. We need something to get excited about during this time of year. We need something to get our blood going.

Into this week, however, another event strikes us. That event, of course, was the death of a great woman, Coretta Scott King. We tolled the Cathedral bells on Tuesday morning just after we heard the news.

"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."

Coretta Scott King surely did not faint. She walked. She ran. She was lifted up on eagles' wings. But she did not faint. She did not succumb to the pressures of the world, to the pressures of married life, or to the pressure of being married to such a public and great man. She did not succumb to the pressures of institutional life, running a business.

She did not succumb to the pressures of politics, as she persisted in getting a federal holiday named in honor of Martin. She did not succumb to the pressures of family life, trying to raise four children, not just when they were small - but even now as differ, like any of us would, about how to run a family institution.

No matter what the medium -- bell or telegram, groundhog or e-mail-- God still uses people the most often. God uses people who wait upon the Lord. God uses us who wait upon the Lord to renew our strength.

Forty years after the first Super Bowl, forty days after Christmas, forty days before the end of winter and forty days before Spring appears, no matter what we've been through, no matter how long we wait, we claim that our strength is ultimately - not from the mighty things of this world-- but from God.

"Have you not known? Have you not heard?" asks Isaiah, "The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth." "...To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One."

Even Super Bowl players will grow weary some time. Even the Rolling Stones will be exhausted one day. Presidents have their term trusting in horses and chariots. Even great prophets fall. We all turn away afraid of shadows in the wintertime.

"Even youths will faint and be weary,  
and the young will fall exhausted;  
but 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."

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler  
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