Prophets sometimes act like coaches. I was reminded of this when I read an obituary this week. Coach John Cheney, Hall of Fame basketball coach at Temple University for 24 years, died at age 89.

Coach Cheney was known to say to his young basketball recruits: “I’m not going to stick a lollipop in your mouth. I’m going to coach you like a man.” He promised the parents and grandparents that he would push the young men **and** give them a chance to graduate. Cheney knew that college basketball like life, would have rough patches. He coached not just the basketball player, but the whole person.

The Prophet Isaiah in our first reading today sounds like a coach; pushing a tired and weary people; at first tough with them and then pleading with them; reminding them of who they are, and then re-igniting a hopeful flame under flagging spirits.

The people in the lesson from Isaiah today are not athletes, not a basketball team, but a tired people of Israel, discouraged by years of distance and exile from their homeland. Weary. Sometimes forgetting the power of God. Sometimes forgetting how to imagine a new future. Isaiah offers them strong, prophetic coaching. I can almost see the prophet pacing up and down the sidelines like a coach. Or kneeling as close as possible to the court. Yelling at players. Maybe shouting at the refs. Throwing up his hands with questions: *Have you not heard? Have you not known?* What don’t you understand?

As one commentator puts it, sometimes we are ‘theological amnesiacs’. Times of crisis throw us off our game. Panic, despair, and a sense of disconnection can set in.

Isaiah’s sharp questions call his audience to attention. Once heads are turned, and ears attuned, the prophet relents… his coaching tone softens. He teaches and mentors those weary people. He gathers them in through his words. I like to imagine a coaching scenario – a time out where the coach says come on team, “Time to listen and focus.” Isaiah proclaims: God, provider, protector, and creator, foundation of all – does not grow weary. *The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth*. He spreads the heavens like a tent, a home for us. We humans may fall apart, and forget, and grow weary but this doesn’t happen to God. We might not always understand God; we might need to be patient and do some waiting. But wait for the Lord, Isaiah says, and God will renew your strength: *those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles.*

This eagle image is a really beautiful one. We may envision God lifting us up, carrying us and protecting us. There is more going on here with this eagle image. When eagles molt their wings, new feathers replace the old ones. God is ever renewing and creating newness among God’s people – shoring us up, helping us shed whatever needs shedding and growing us where we need sustenance. That too is something we may lose track of. Isaiah’s coaching voice cuts through any wavering:

*God does not faint or grow weary… He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the*

*powerless…those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength… they shall run and not*

*be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

God has the stamina for the world weary. Stamina is something athletes need. Stamina is something we all need – God’s boundless creative and renewing possibilities.

In the Gospel today, Jesus moves about the village of Capernaum living testament to the prophet’s words. Jesus is in the house of two recruits (to stay with coaching language) Simon and Andrew. Simon’s mother-in-law is sick in bed with a fever. Jesus goes to her. Jesus takes her by the hand and raises her up. Certainly, a renewal and restoration. The woman gains new wings, new health.

It was said of the Temple basketball coach Cheney, “He had the passion and fire of a preacher… When he spoke, your eyes went nowhere else in the room. He almost spoke through your skin and to your heart and to your mind.”

Don’t you wonder what it felt like, or what Jesus sounded like when he reached out to heal not only Simon’s mother-in-law, but the many who gathered that day around Simon’s house? Jesus’ hands always extended outward. The Gospel says that the whole city crowded around the door. Another great image from scripture today! Jesus healed one woman and continued to renew, restore, and strengthen others throughout Galilee.

We lose sight of this healed woman as the Gospel narrative continues. We hear nothing more about Simon’s mother-in-law. Except for the one tiny, post healing detail: *She began to serve them.* Now this detail tells us that she was indeed fully healed. She was well enough to get up and go about her usual household tasks. But it could be understood in another way. She became a disciple.

That’s the way God works. As the writer Anne Lamott humorously writes: “Again and again I tell God I need help, and God says, “Well isn’t that fabulous?  Because I need help too.  So – you go get that woman over there some water, and I’ll figure out what we’re going to do about *your*stuff.” (“*Traveling Mercies*,” p.120)

We as a people of God receive the same strengthening, renewing and creative power of God proclaimed in Isaiah and the Gospel. The church’s ministry is to be the renewing and strengthening hands of Christ. Sometimes it is a coaching ministry. (With the Superbowl tonight, keep an eye on the sidelines and what the coaches are saying!) Perhaps a ministry of coaching that is filled with a passion, and fire, a little toughness, and a voice that speaks through the skin to the heart, to the mind.

But always, proclaiming the hope and power of God, the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth, God who does not faint, or grow weary.