

Message on Thursday, September 11, 2025

“But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.” – Isaiah 40:31

Dear church,

I have a dear friend in Germany who has been hurting a lot in recent years. A general practitioner (doctor) in a small town in Bavaria, he had several health crises and had to shut down his practice recently for an extended time. He is in good care and getting better, but as we talked over the phone several times, I learned things I hadn't been fully aware of. I know him since my student days in Munich, but a lot of the stuff he is dealing with goes back to childhood. I know, that sounds like cliché but is absolutely true. And one of those “things” or traumata was a horrendous tragic accident that he witnessed when he was 12 years old, on the cusp of becoming a teenager.

I looked it up and it's a sad tale, even 50 years later. It happened on a gorgeous early summer day, on June 8, 1975 when two opposing trains crashed into each other at full speed, due to human error and the lack of sophisticated communication technology at the time. The line had only a single track between two stations and the station masters miscommunicated, each one assuming their own train was given the right of way. When they realized their mistake, it was too late and they couldn't reach the conductors in either train. In fact, the people on the ground started calling for help and for ambulances even before the crash occurred, saying, “Two trains are about to collide on this line.”

Well, my friend, his father and two of his brothers were on that train after a long day hiking in the mountains. They had been barely able to make the train, running to catch it. (It almost cost them their lives.) What was so unfortunate is that at the point of collision one train came out of a curve and a forested area. Those conductors had no chance to seeing each other until it was too late to slow down. They both perished. And my friend and his family members were in the very first car behind the engine!

My friend's father described their stroke of good fortune and survival in an article with a local newspaper all those years later (he is 90 now). He said, “The boys had so much energy even after the long hike, bouncing off the wall and playing catch in the train that we started getting dirty looks.” They gradually moved back in the train car to a section where they couldn't disturb as many people. Well, that move saved their lives. On that day, 42 people died and more than 120 were injured. The carnage was unbelievable. The train car that they sat in was

lifted into the air and landed on its roof in the grass. Miraculously, they walked out almost unscathed. My friend's father added that after this experience he never reprimanded his boys again for being too rambunctious. He called them his guardian angels.

We never know what people have gone through in their lives until we get to know them on a deeper level and sometimes not until much later. Witnessing this tragedy, so totally unexpected, striking with such deadly force, does something with people, especially at that age. Yet, God has given us resilience, and I am sure my friend will be resilient and resourceful enough to get through this. It helps that he has deep faith. But let us pay attention. People are often hurting more than they appear to be, until they can't hold it anymore. As a church, as Christians, we keep our hearts wide open for people who are hurting among us. We are watching out for one another.

Have a most blessed week,
Pastor Andreas Wagner