

Getting in shape to move (Isaiah 35:1-10)

“Make firm the feeble knees,” the prophet calls.

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After careful observation of my elders, I created an alert on my digital calendar for March 17, 2050, the date of my 70th birthday. It reads: “Replace all replaceable parts.”

I’ve seen what happens when older relatives and friends delay knee or hip replacement surgery: the grueling buzz of chronic pain; decreased mobility; diminished scope of travel, activities, and social lives. Those who wait too long can miss the opportunity to schedule surgery when their body can still tolerate the procedure and the post-op physical therapy; they never get relief. Meanwhile, those who go ahead and swap out their joints when still relatively young can bounce back from surgery quickly and then enjoy decades of walking, pickleball, and scooping up grandchildren, all without pain.

“Make firm the feeble knees,” the prophet calls. Get ready to move. Prepare to make the ascent to worship; get in shape so you can bow to honor the coming king. Become brave again, take courage, so your knees will not tremble and collapse out of fear. The Advent posture of waiting is not one of passive idling, but of active preparation and an intentional shift in attitude. It’s time to get going, so we can be ready; we cannot delay.

Isaiah’s instructions come not to an individual but to an entire community. His verbs are all plural; no one needs to heed his call alone. Like a church volunteering to cook and drive for recent surgical patients, it takes many hands to get all our knees back into action. Isaiah reminds us to encourage one another, to cheer the fearful, to shore up those who have been discouraged. “God will come and save us!” we remind ourselves and our neighbors, building strength with every repetition, physical therapy for the soul.

And when that day comes? Disabled theologians remind us that the real obstacle is not in any body’s physical limitations but in a society that refuses to provide opportunities to all. When the glory of the Lord dawns, barriers will transform into access; uneven steps will turn into the smoothest ramps; a great accessible highway will lead the way to Zion. Even those who waited too long for knee replacement will find themselves leaping for joy. All God’s people will make their way across the blooming desert with singing: walking or rolling, skipping, jogging, maneuvering our walkers and rollators. We will be one community strong and steady, with everlasting joy upon our heads.