

# *“Weary Saints”*

**Mark 1:29-39, Isaiah 40:21-31**

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From the Pulpit

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Prayer for Illumination: May the words of my mouth  
and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable  
in your sight O God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

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Isaiah chapter 40 is one of the great passages of Scripture. It begins with these words, “Comfort, O comfort my people, says the Lord.” Those words are well known to us not only from Scripture but also from their use in Handel’s Messiah. In fact, Handel uses several phrases from this passage in writing music about God’s promised Savior. But today we jump to the end of the passage where Isaiah says in verses 30 and 31, “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.”<sup>1</sup>

Isaiah was writing to the Hebrew exiles in Babylon. They had been there for a couple of generations. Back home in Jerusalem the temple had been demolished. Their houses lay in ruins. The people were depressed and apathetic. Optimism was in short supply. God was preparing a highway in the desert, in order to bring the people home, but they doubted they would have the strength to make the journey. Even young people who should have been eager for the adventure

were disheartened. “Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted.” It is a sad picture indeed, a picture of an exhausted and weary people.

We do not have to go far to have a picture of exhausted and weary people today. Just look around. Isn't that how many of us feel today? Many of us are weary travelers. Weary saints on the journey through this life.

I've might have been surprised in April at how weary I felt, but it doesn't phase me now. Like most of you, I haven't been as active as I usually am, and sometimes I even sleep in a little more than usual. But I still seem quite tired. Nothing surprises me now on the ways in which the mundane-exhaust and the routine is far from normal. Others say they feel the same way. And the weariness we feel is not only a physical weariness. It's a spiritual and mental weariness.

Signs of light and hope are sometimes hard to discern. One day things seem to be looking up; the next day is full of gloom and doom. We feel we have lost control and in many ways we really have. We feel displaced, almost like exiles in a strange land.

I want to share now part of an essay written for Time magazine by a writer named Brigid Schulte<sup>2</sup>. This is how she begins:

One evening when my kids were young, I was outside weeding my infernal gravel yard that, if left untended, begins to look like a furry Chia Pet. They were bouncing with sheer delight on the trampoline.

“Mommy, come jump with us!” they cried. “In a minute,” I kept saying. “Just let me finish weeding.” It was a time in my life when I used to routinely ask myself, “What do I need to do before I can feel O.K.?” And then I'd run through a never-ending mental list. That

evening, with a familiar sense of vague panic rising, I felt compelled to finish at least one thing — the weeding — on that long, long list.

Lost in my churning thoughts, I didn't notice the sun go down. Or hear my kids go inside. When I looked up again, the sky was dark, the yard still covered in weeds, and I was alone.

Schulte continues...

... this is how it felt to live my life most days: scattered, fragmented, exhausted. I was always doing more than one thing at a time and felt I never did any one particularly well. I was always behind and always late, with one more thing and one more thing and one more thing to do before rushing out the door. Entire hours evaporated while I did stuff that “needed to get done.” But once I'd done it, I couldn't tell you what it was I had done or why it seemed so important. I felt like the Red Queen of *Through the Looking-Glass* on speed, running as fast as I could — usually on the fumes of four or five hours of sleep — and getting nowhere. Like the dream I kept having about trying to run a race wearing ski boots.

Does any of her story sound familiar? You don't have to be a working mother to have this experience. I know plenty of others who are overwhelmed by all they feel they need to do. I know plenty of retired folks whose to do list is long and unrealistic. (I think that is true in pre pandemic and current pandemic times.) That's why I love Schulte's question:

“What do I need to do before I can feel O.K.?”

How do you answer that question? Seriously, how do you answer that question? What do you need to do before you can feel O.K.?

Maybe you answer that question: There is nothing I need to do to feel O.K. I always feel O.K. because I know my self-worth rests in God's love for me. If that is your answer, bully for you and please feel free to tune out for the next few minutes because this sermon is addressed to those of us who have a more nuanced response to that question.

The times and situations we find ourselves in are extraordinary. We have at one time or another felt the burden of physical, emotional or mental fatigue. Sometimes all at once. It's not only our bodies, but also our minds and spirits that are overloaded. Like the ancient Hebrew exiles, we have become weary and exhausted.

So this is a time to hear the words of God spoken through the prophet Isaiah. These words are for us, too. "They 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."

Now these great words contain both an invitation and a promise. As we act on the invitation we receive what God promises.

First, the invitation. "They who wait upon the Lord..."

Now the invitation to wait may not be especially welcome these days. Our patience may be running low. Yes, we are doing what we can to stay safe and to look after ourselves and one another. All that is good. But mainly we are waiting rather impatiently until these dark days have passed and we can get back to some degree of normal life. (Dare I say Normal Life.) And yet there is great value in waiting upon God. And so we are invited to, "Wait upon the Lord." That means spending time in God's presence and in his word just as we are doing now.

When life is smooth and kind we tend to be self-sufficient, depending on ourselves and our own resources. But these times remind us of our dependence on God, and on our interdependence upon one another. In our weariness and exhaustion, we learn that our own human resources are not sufficient; that we really need God and each other. So we can use these days to wait upon God, even more than usual, seeking God's truth in the word and God's presence in prayer and worship. We are invited to wait upon God with a sense of dependence. It is an invitation given by Jesus himself, "Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavily burdened and I will give you rest."

Jesus teaches that the God on whom we wait has drawn very near to us. The everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth is the one who knows and loves and cares for each one of us. God does not faint or grow weary. So the Psalmist says, "Wait on the Lord, 'be of good courage, and God will strengthen your heart,' wait I say, on the Lord."

While the first piece is the invitation to wait on the Lord, the second comes as the promise for those who wait upon the Lord. "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." And God fulfilled that promise for the Hebrew exiles, strengthening them to walk along the wilderness highway back home again; then strengthening them yet again for the rebuilding of their nation and the Temple.

Back to Schulte's essay, to help her deal with her constant sense of being overwhelmed, she seeks out a productivity expert. The expert's approach to time management is simple: You can't manage time.

Time never changes. There will always be 168 hours in a week. What you can manage are the activities you choose to do in that time. And what busy and overwhelmed people need to realize, the expert says, is that you will never be able to do everything you think you need to, want to or should do. The expert says:

“When we die, the email inbox will still be full. The to-do list will still be there. But you won’t,” she told us. “Eighty percent of the email that comes in is crap anyway, and it takes you the equivalent of 19 1/2 weeks a year just to sort through it. Eighty percent of your to-do list is crap. Look, the stuff of life never ends. That is life. You will never clear your plate so you can finally allow yourself to get to the good stuff. So you have to decide. What do you want to accomplish in this life? What’s important to you right now?”

That’s the key, isn’t it? When we answer the question: what do I need to do to feel OK the answer should include those things that are important to us – things that matter. It shouldn’t just list things like weeding.”

For help with all of this, let’s look at Jesus.

What does Jesus need to do before he can be OK? The passage from Mark this morning, helps us answer that question. In those few verses we learn about how Jesus spends his days, how he allocates his 168 hours per week. During his week, Jesus...

- Spends time with the disciples
- Heals people – help them return to their lives
- Shares good news – tells them about God – tells them about God’s love for them – tells them about God’s desire for them to have an abundant life

- Spends time alone – prayer is the word used – Jesus attends to his own spirit – connects with God

That's a pretty good list. So, what do we need to do before we are OK?

- Spend time with people who matter to us
- Being a part of something bigger than ourselves
- Contribute to the healing of the world in some tangible way - make the world a better place – a more whole place
- Nourish our spirits, connect with God

On my best days, my answer includes some of the things that I just mentioned. I would like to have more best days.

God is strengthening us so to see beyond the current struggles and to keep a longer view in mind, remembering the great future God has prepared for God's people and all of creation. Lift up your eyes and see. God is at work and God is not finished yet.

God is also renewing our strength so that we can run and walk with perseverance. "They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint." Along with patience, perseverance is much needed in these days. As the Scripture tells us, "Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us...looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." And God is giving us the strength to do this very thing as we wait.

These are difficult days. There is no shame in feeling weary or exhausted. But God's invitation and God's promise is sure. "They who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength..." And by God's grace and by the power of the Holy Spirit it we step toward this table

to be nourished, to be fed, to be renewed. For all you weary saints-  
come and be fed- be renewed by the presence of God, in our lives,  
from long ago and for all the days to come.

Thanks be to God. Amen

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<sup>1</sup> Reference by Rev. John Tapscott, Strength for the weary, 4/25/20, Streestville  
United Church.

<sup>2</sup> [http://time.com/48975/overwhelmed-time-management-ill-finish-the-dishes-when-  
im-dead/](http://time.com/48975/overwhelmed-time-management-ill-finish-the-dishes-when-im-dead/)

Story from colleague, Rev. Amy Miracle, bspc.org