

Weary

Rev. John Allen

For the longest time the question, “how are you doing?” was a simple, polite phrase, almost akin to simply saying hello.

Mostly we have reflexive answers, “pretty good. and you?”

I called a friend the other day who I hadn’t spoken to in a few months, and the conversation started just like this.

How are you? He asked.

Pretty good. I responded.

And he said: “Really?! Good?!”

We are living in a moment right now where we each walk around not only carrying the stress and fear and challenge of life in a pandemic, but where we cannot help but we aware that others are carrying this too.

I would venture to say that, while we are certainly being impacted to varying degrees, few of us can really say without complication of caveat that we are doing well right now.

“How are you doing?”

I have started to hear responses like:

“You know...”

or, “I’m good, all things considered”

or a favorite, “I am... pandemic-fine.”

After all, when we start a conversation with this simple question, “how are you?” we usually aren’t inviting a paragraph-length response.

But everyone once and a while, we are really asking. And the intonation changes....

No really... *how are you?*

How are you?

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Prayer is one place where I hear this deeper question. When I manage to really settle into a sense of my connection with God, my relationship with Christ, I may rattle through some things in my mind that are vexing or troubling me.

Yet I always find in prayer this deeper invitation. Jesus will always say to our souls, “No really... *how are you?*”

How are you?

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I came across a poem this week that really helped me answer this question for myself, and I want to share it with you.

It is a poem by Sarah Are, a Presbyterian pastor from Dallas, Texas. The title of this poem is Matthew 11:28, which is the first verse Steve read for us a moment ago, “Come to me all you who are weary, and I will give you rest.”

Here is the poem:

I said I was tired, but I didn't mean it.
Tired is I didn't sleep well.
Tired is waiting for the caffeine to kick in.
Tired is the seventeenth zoom meeting of the day.

What I really meant was something closer to exhausted;
which is standing at the kitchen sink because dinner won't cook itself,
and the mental math in stretching a paycheck,
and the way my body carries stress.

But even that's not quite right.
If I was *really* honest I would have said I am weary, because weary is
trying to remain optimistic when we just don't know.
Weary is the way part of me always misses home.
Weary is playing it safe every single time.
Weary is the language of the soul.

I suppose that is why Jesus didn't say, “come to me all you who are tired.”
This love has always been deeper than that.

This poem pulled my heart right to a word that had been waiting for it. Weary.

I am weary. Are you?

Jesus looks right through the tiredness and fatigue of everyday life. He sees right past our rationalizing that if we just got a little more sleep, or a little extra exercise, or if the kids would just start sleeping through the night.

And sees what Sarah Are calls, the “language of the soul.” Weary. We are weary.

Weariness is not cured by a nap or a cup of coffee. So what do we do.

Jesus says: “come you me all you who are weary and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

So wait a minute. Jesus answer to our weariness is another burden? However light. I think the last thing a weary soul wants to hear is hear is, “here take this burden instead.”

But I think that is part of the difference between tiredness and weariness.

When we are tired we might be able to get back by just putting everything down for a bit.
Taking a day off, or a good nap.

When we are weary though, it is not enough to simply set down our burdens for a bit and then pick the same ones back up.

We need a new way. And this is what Jesus is offering us.

Jesus' invitation to us who are weary and heavy laden is not just to unyoke ourselves from life's burdens and rest a spell to catch our breath.

Jesus' invitation is to yoke our lives to an entirely new cart, to take on the way of Jesus, which while certainly bearing its own great challenges and costs, compared to all the expectations and assumptions that clutter our hearts, is relatively easy, and light.

"come you me all you who are weary and I will give you rest. Take *my* yoke upon you, for *my* yoke is easy and my burden is light."

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When I think back to the early weeks of this pandemic, now nearly a year ago, I remember lots of extraordinarily optimistic visions about how this time would transform our lives.

What a great time to learn a new language, or a new skill! Think of the reading I can finally catch up on!

You couldn't find a packet of yeast in the grocery store because of all the new bakers.

And home fitness equipment was backordered months.

Pretty soon, zoom visits with family and friends started filling up evenings, and of course for those fortunate enough to be able to work remotely, the work seemed only to grow and the boundaries between work and home collapsed, and our workday spilled further and further into the evening.

School got harder for our kids, fewer hours still somehow led to more stress.

It is no wonder that we have grown weary.

So here is Jesus' invitation.

Lay down this burden. Lay down the expectations you have heaped on yourself. It is ok if this pandemic is not a time of measurable self improvement. I expect that looking back on this year a generation from now, the true measure of having had a successful 2020 will be having survived.

Lay down your illusion of control. Things will happen to us and around us that are beyond our control and will derail our best laid plans.

Lay down your distractions that are keeping you from feeling your feelings.

Lay down the coping mechanisms that you know are not really helping.

And take on the way of Jesus.

Take on the sure knowledge that God cares for everything from you to the smallest sparrow.

Take on the perspective that our strength comes from the depth of our care for one another.

Take on the joyous work of loving people.

Take on the challenge of making your life a site of reconciliation and hope.

Take on a counter-cultural practice of doing something as unproductive as signing off, sitting still, and praying.

The burden Jesus lays on us is not weightless. But is lighter than what we tend to accumulate through unintentional living.

The yoke Jesus offers us makes its own demands, and yet it sets before us a way to abundant life.

This is an offer to us. But it requires that we not see our spiritual life as yet another thing that we can crowd into our list of activities.

It requires that we set down. And take up.

So How *are* you? Really.

Really. I would welcome hearing from you, and next time we talk, please know that I am really asking.

How *are* you?

And I invite you to extend this genuine asking to one another, to those that you know within this community and beyond. Reach out. Ask the second time, how *are* you? Really.

Let's speak to each other in the language of our souls, share with one another what our hearts truly carry, and find together how we can set down what has brought us to this place of weariness, and pick up Christ's way of life.

