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Matthew 10:40-42
Jeremiah 28:5-9
Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18
Romans 6:12-23

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The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

How many of you like to nap? That might include the short cat nap, the long rainy afternoon nap, or the ever popular, “I’m just resting my eyes” nap. Personally, I’m a big fan of the “I’m just resting my eyes nap”. I am also notorious for taking naps during a movie, even the movie’s where you are sitting on the edge of your seat. When I read a book, I nod off into a really nice quiet nap. And, if you walk by my office window and it looks as though I am praying...I’m probably napping.

I even took a nap while I was writing this sermon. Although my napping habits have become the brunt of jokes in my home, I am also becoming well aware that I am chronically tired. Not just tired from a long day but the kind of tired that comes from a build-up day after day of long hours of worry, stress, and all around over-doing it. I am exhausted. My guess is that you are exhausted as well. So, let’s name our fatigue for what it is...the on-going wear and tear of the world we are living through right now.

As I talked with friends and colleagues this past week, we seemed to all acknowledge a deep sense of exhaustion and along with the exhaustion, we also acknowledged that we had no clear way forward, no way out of it all. Maybe you can relate. But...folks, this isn’t the time for a nap.

So what are we to do?

Let’s start with our Gospel reading from Matthew. Verses 40-42 are the final verses in what is sometimes called the Missionary Discourse. Jesus has been giving his disciples guidance on what it will look like when they head out into the world. They have been prepared and now they are being sent. Jesus, outlining the work ahead, gives them authority over unclean spirits and to cast out demons. He gives them the ability to cure diseases and heal the sick. He tells them to proclaim the Good News. It’s a job description of sorts, bullet point by bullet point.

But...he warns them that their work will not be easy. And, in the other duties as assigned category, Jesus tells them that they will experience persecution. There will be division in their families. People won’t understand their new commitments. They will experience suffering because of their convictions. This is a risky life that they are undertaking. My gut tells me there is probably a verse somewhere in this text that got edited out along the way...something that probably warned the disciples...you are going to get really tired and you are going to need a nap. But no matter how tired you get, you must keep going.

Not to be too much of a downer, Jesus does try to uplift the disciples, reminding them that no matter how hard their work may be, they will find welcome. In other words, it’s time to get to work but within the challenge of the calling there will also be joy. Within the uncertainty they

will face, there will also be peace. Within the exhaustion and fatigue there will also be moments of renewal and rest.

That's the reality of being sent.

There's another reality that stands out to me and it is this...Jesus tells the disciples that their work is going to cause division, division within families and with friends, division among neighbors. Folks, that is a hard pill to swallow – that your relationships will become divisive and painful. Earlier in chapter 10, we are told that brother will betray brother and a father his child and children will rebel against their parents and that you will be hated because you are a follower of Christ.

What does this look like for you and for me today? I think it looks like this...We are all standing upon certain convictions right now, convictions of faith, convictions of justice, convictions of national identity, and convictions of community responsibility. Hopefully, those convictions are grounded in our understanding of the Good News, of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Hopefully, we have done some difficult work to reconcile what Jesus has taught us and what is going on in our world today. Hopefully, we have built our perspectives and our actions around the people Jesus calls us to be, even when it is hard.

And yet, (here's the stumbling block), I find that my convictions no matter how informed by my faith they may be, may still be in opposition to my friends and family who have convictions just as strong as mine, just as convicted as mine, just as faithful as mine. In our divided world, it is often the case that both sides feel they are doing the work of Jesus.

I wonder how many of you are feeling the fatigue of faithful communication through this kind of division right now...where your faith commitments seem to be in constant conflict with others. Where you often shut down for fear of being met with anger or judgement because of your differing opinions. Where you have become afraid to do the work Jesus has called you to do. Maybe tension is high in your home. Maybe your friends are saying things you just don't understand or agree with. Maybe you find yourself saying...who are these people? Maybe you find yourself thinking it is exhausting to be nice at times like this!

At yet, Jesus calls us to radical welcome and hospitality...even in times like these. Even when we are tired. Even when we are worn out and afraid. Even when our opinions and actions seem to be in direct opposition to those whom we share our life with. Jesus reminds us, *"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."*

Henri Nouwen, in his book *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*, states, *"Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines."*

Welcome, not judgement. Love, not hate. Conversation, not confrontation. Nouwen doesn't say that the dividing lines won't be there. They will. He simply reminds us that they should not hinder our unconditional care for one another.

We are going to be tired for a while to come. We are going to want to nap. But Jesus encourages us to keep going and to not lose sight of the mission we are called to embark upon as Christians.

Remember that as followers of Jesus, people will be looking toward each and every one of us to be examples of peace building, of reconciliation, of justice, and of mercy. They will be looking to us to show humility in the face of division and love in the face of hate. We are Jesus' hands. We are Jesus' heart...in every encounter, in every conversation, in every relationship.

There will be time to rest but for now...Jesus needs each and every one of us to keep going.

Thanks be to God. Amen.