

“For One Who is Exhausted...”¹

Easter 3B, Psalm 4:8

Grace Church Newton

April 14, 2024

THIS IS A DRAFT TEXT OF THE SERMON. IT MAY VARY FROM THE PRESENTED VERSION. PLEASE EXCUSE TYPOS AND GRAMMATICAL ERRORS, AND DO NOT CITE WITHOUT PERMISSION.

“I lie down in peace; at once I fall asleep; For only you, Lord, make me dwell in safety.” Amen.

“I lie down in peace; at once I fall asleep.” It doesn’t always work that way, does it?

A couple of weeks ago, on Easter Sunday, I left Grace following our Easter celebration and headed to the airport to travel to Kentucky for a family funeral. We were converging in my mom’s hometown to honor and to bury one of my elders after a good long life. I looked forward to seeing my big southern family. And after the days spent preparing for Holy Week and Easter, I also looked forward to two nights in a hotel room with blackout shades, without – sorry, Sweetie! – without my husband rustling sheets beside me, without a dog moving about, without my children – who had been home for spring break – walking up and down the stairs late at night. I was exhausted, and I needed to lie down in peace and fall asleep for a good long time.

Night one: before 7:00 in the morning, the commercial trash trucks arrived, beeping as they backed up and lifted a series of big dumpsters on my side of the building. So much for that.

Night two: and you may remember this – the same storm front that delivered some post-Easter snow here in parts of Massachusetts was blowing through Kentucky. At 4:30 in the morning, the tornado sirens began to sound. And then again at 4:45. And then again at 5:00, when all the phones also began to shriek with warning. The first two alarms I just put my pillow on my head and tried to keep sleeping. This last time, two options took shape in my sleepy brain: I could either take my pillow and my comforter and go back to sleep in the bathtub, or I could just admit that my day had begun and make my way to the lobby for a cup of coffee and an update on the weather.

It may be a life transition, financial worries, concern for a loved one, anticipation of a stressful week, being faced with an important decision...or an early morning trash

¹ [Source](#), p. 125-126.

collection or a middle of the night tornado warning system.... Lying down in peace and at once falling asleep – it doesn't always work that way.

And if you're anything like me – reading the news first thing in the morning, and then reading the news again at night before you go to sleep – the habit's not great for a good night's sleep. Nor is the state of our world conducive to a good night's sleep.

For those of us who are worried, who are concerned for our country in this election year and for our world in this time of continuing violence, how are we to lie down in peace?

So, I've been thinking about this. And I am going to suggest that cultivating a practice that leads to peacefulness and a settled spirit may be *precisely* what we are called to right now. I'll repeat that: cultivating a practice that leads to peacefulness and a settled spirit may be *precisely* what we are called to in these troubling days.

I read the psalmist, and I hear echoes of some of what *our* world is offering up these days:

- "Many are saying, 'Oh, that we might see better times!'" they write.
- "Lift up the light of your countenance upon us, O Lord," the psalmist cries out with yearning,
- "Answer me when I call, O God, defender of my cause...have mercy on me and hear my prayer."

I could imagine those same pleas emerging from our lips today.

So how do we get from this – "Oh, that we might see better times!" – to a place where we can lie down in peace? Our psalmist suggests a path.

- Know that God does wonders for the faithful, the psalmist exhorts.
- Know that when you call upon God, God will hear.
- Know that God, the defender of our cause, sets us free when we are hard-pressed.

It may not look like what we expect, but ours is to trust that in God's way and in God's time God hears our cry.

Or we might look to today's Gospel. The author of Luke describes that Jesus suddenly "stood among the disciples and said to them, 'Peace be with you,'" (Luke 24:36b), just as we heard in the gospel of Mark last week. In this, their last exchange, Jesus wishes them peace, and then, we are told, he describes his mission, and therefore their continuing mission, as proclaiming "repentance and forgiveness of sins." In other words, Jesus appeared and with his last words called them to be at peace and to teach and practice reconciliation.

As I was procrastinating writing this sermon, I picked up a couple of books and started leafing through them. I found myself in John O'Donohue – yes, again – and I came across a

verse in a poem that pierced my heart. It wasn't until I went back to cite the specific source – as I was typing – that I realized this blessing-in-the-form-of-a-poem was entitled “For One Who Is Exhausted” [[Source](#), 125-126]. Funny how the Spirit works, huh? The poem-blessing begins:

*When the rhythm of the heart becomes hectic,
Time takes on the strain until it breaks...*

*You have traveled too fast over false ground;
Now your soul has come to take you back.*

This, an expression of what it can be like when one is exhausted. As I said, one verse in particular caught my attention:

*Stay clear of those vexed in spirit, O'Donohue writes,
Learn to linger around someone of ease
Who feels they have all the time in the world.*

That stopped me short. I've known those people, maybe you have, too. The ones whose spirits are not vexed, the ones whose presence creates a field of comfort and rest. And I consciously aspire to also offer this kind of refuge. But can I honestly say I've been one of them?

In this world where I would suggest – if we're paying attention – we are all exhausted, can we aspire to offer this kind of refuge to each other and to our neighbors? Can we as individuals, can we as a community of Christ-followers cultivate a place of rest and recovery in this angry, upside-down season? While holding the tragedy that is real around us, can we also hold the joy and the beauty and the peace that also shine through? Can we be a community that teaches and practices reconciliation? Even as the sirens in our world are sounding around us, can we be NOT those who are vexed in spirit, but those who are at ease, who offer rest and respite to a weary, worried world?

Now, this is not the only message Jesus exemplified in his ministry. Jesus, the one who points towards God's kingdom of justice and mercy in this world and beyond, the one whose teachings we are to follow... From what we have received, he was not uniformly calm and peaceful. He turned over tables in the temple. He sparred verbally with the authorities of his time. He commanded evil spirits to depart from those who were afflicted. So the notion of offering spaciousness instead of challenge; of being at ease instead of being vexed...this isn't the only message one might take from the gospel record. But it is the one that is ringing loud and clear through these texts, at least for me, at least in these days.

So here I land. Can we be a place of rest? In our time, can we be a source of respite? For each of us, for those who find their way here to Grace, can we be a refuge? Through the mercy of God, can we step into this frightened, uncertain time – as Jesus did in his own – and say, “Peace be with you?” Can we teach and live reconciliation? Can we know that God – in the Psalmist’s words – the defender of our cause, hears our yearning when we call, sets us free when we are hard-pressed, leads us to a place where we can lie down in peace; and at once fall asleep? For only you, O God, make us dwell in safety.

Through the grace of God, may we find and may we offer refuge in challenging times.
Amen.