

## Weariness<sup>1</sup>

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Weariness has many causes. First of all

1) There is simple physical fatigue. weariness at day's end – just tired. Worked hard – exhausted – and may be a little “people fatigue” mixed in – and the cure? Why it's as simple as the cause. (Short of malnutrition and illness) “Rest” + poss. a bit of solitude – Jesus himself was often worried by 1) plain physical exhaustion + 2) the press of people. And he knew the simplest home remedy: 1) rest for the body + 2) quiet for the mind. Indeed – that's so simple – so unsophisticated a remedy against fatigue 9/10<sup>th</sup> of us won't follow it.

For we ...? Hounded even on vacation by clock and calendar to keep to a schedule the body was never intended to keep, we often can't understand why we grow weary, why our bodies turn on us and attack us. We even call it an “attack.”

But Jesus? No He followed biological-time and sun-time. He had no agenda no clock. Simple sticks to tell the hour. Hungry – he ate. Worry – he slept. Worn by the press (of people) he found a quiet place off by himself – (wilderness, mountain, sea) I have always loved but seldom followed that very simple sentence in the gospel of St. John, “... Jesus, wearied as he was ... sat down...” (Jo. 4:6) Simple – but profound. We neglect it – to our peril.

But the etiology of weariness is not always so simple. It may be caused not by phy. fatigue + the press of people – but by monotonous work or no work to do. Nothing is as tiresome as “passing time.” But even when we have much work to do – and even when it is well done. Curiously, St Paul has to remind Christians not to grow weary in doing well. “Let us not grow weary in well-doing.” (Gal. 6:9a) (Strange, but there is a monotony in doing well that causes a peculiar weariness all its own. There is a tedium in success. (Just keeping up your reputation for excellence can be exhausting.) That's why the typical “missing person” in the U.S.A. is a man with a good job, a wife and two children. Who has none-the-less run away from home. So Paul knew long ago, to warn Christians not to let “doing well” get you down. “Do not lose heart,” Paul said. That is – keep some heart in it, in what you must do day after day after day etc. Some warm humanity in it. For when the work we must do over and over again becomes

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<sup>1</sup> This is a modified version of a sermon delivered on February 26, 1964 with the same title.

mechanical and impersonal, it becomes not just monotonous but impossible to carry on. We'd like to disappear. So remember – says Paul – how much you are needed – that you are important to God and those who love you – this will keep your heart in it – + keep you going – for what your heart is in – your hands can do – + boredom will never get you!!

But if boredom doesn't get you, discouragement may: "When the gods would defeat they first discouraged." It is in the third place the source of a very profound weariness. No one is more weary than a discouraged woman or a discouraged man. As Achitophel said about King David - "I will come upon David while he is weary with discouragement and thereby threw him into a panic." (2 Sam. 17:2a) True for us too. When we are already weary with discouragement, we are easy to panic – we don't have the strength to fight. We are all prepared to give up and die. We magnify problems all out of proportion.

So poor Rebekah in Bk. of Genesis, weary with her procrastinating husband Issac, and her rebellious son Jacob, discouraged about the general state of her family life, has a giving out spell, weeps, pleads weariness unto death: ever known a woman who had "giving out spells?" No? Well. You haven't been around much – have you? "Then Rebekah said to Issac: 'I am weary of my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women, what good will my life be to me?'" (Gen. 27:46) In short, she wishes she were dead, and I don't think she is putting on. She is weary of the discouragements of the family life and has some right to be. In this instance her hysteria pays off. Her sluggish husband finally wakes up to what his job is. Her son comes to from his adolescent daze. It was only after Rebekah's tantrum that ... "Issac send Jacob ... and he went."

So sometimes, it may be a little yelling and screaming, a little fit may be required to fix things up a bit. Only if you try it – don't say I suggested it!

Crying – however – doesn't always help. Take the 69<sup>th</sup> Psalmist. He wasn't doing well either. All the crying in the world was not going to help him. He'd tried it. "I am weary with my crying; " he said – "my throat is parched. My eyes grew dim ..." You see he's a good man. He's spent his life fighting for good causes + lost every round. He's preached righteousness and justice for decades in the community and met with nothing but defeat. He's pled his cause till he's hoarse. And who's listened? Nobody. What's he got to show for it? Nothing but laryngitis! Of course he's discouraged. He wants to say we all want to say "what's the use, it's a wicked old world, when you stick your neck out? I quit." But he doesn't say it. He remembers – (a) he's a part of the world he decries ("O God, thou knowest my folly;

the wrongs I have done ... v.5) and (b) humbled, he accepts the fact that he can never make the world over into a paradise, but can only do what little good the good God will do through him (“God will save ... and rebuild” v. 35). So he does the best he can – with what he’s got – trust in God + forges ahead. What more can a man do?

Finally, there is a weariness caused not by phy. fatigue or people fatigue – caused not by monotony or discouragement but caused by a combination of aging, pain and the sight of oncoming death. Read again the deeply moving prayer of Hezekiah in the 38<sup>th</sup> chapter of Isaiah. It is like the great enlightenment of Gautama Buddha. Growing old and desperately ill, he watches through his window the advancing shadow of a sundial, and it seems to his fevered mind the hand of death coming to claim him. Life has seemed all too short to him – folded up too quickly, like a shepherd’s tent, here today and struck tomorrow. He is afraid of death: “Like a hunted swallow or a crane I clamor, I moan like a dove. My eyes are weary with looking upward. Oh Lord, I am oppressed; be thou my security.”

But in the awesome weariness of pain, Hezekiah learns something. He learns that, in the final analysis, “The Lord alone is my salvation-“ that what he had thought in his youth and strength and pride were the important things – his wealth and power, that these are not really important in one’s age – that when the chips are down and life itself is at stake, the things that matter most are the unseen things, a man’s faith in God, his courageous hope, + above all his love, that “by these things men live, and in all these is the life of my spirit.” And there is something else he learns too. Having come very close to death, learning by pain that there are values one can’t buy and only God can give, he vows that in whatever years are left to him, “I shall go softly.” “I shall go softly” – I will be more quiet, more humble, I will deal more gently with my fellows; I will feel closer to their need; I will be not proud + rude, I will be kinder and sweeter, more understanding of other’s pain; I will be more loving. “If I live, O Lord, I shall go more softly all my years.” What better cure for the weariness of aging and illness and the spectre of death than faith in God and to “go more softly” through the years that are left?

Let us pray -

O Lord Christ, as you once were, so we often are weary. Sometimes, all we need is rest + solitude. At other times, what is required is more heart more humanity in our daily work and it will not seem so dull or hard. But there are still other times, O Lord, when what we need for our weariness of soul is forgiveness and more faith, more hope, more love. O Lord, be thou our security as we go more softly through the remaining years. Amen