

Bennochy church 4th June 2017

I found an on line article entitled, "*Why Are Preachers So Exhausted After Preaching?*" I thought, I need to read this!

"Preaching on Sunday morning is, for me, the most exhilarating part of my calling! I cannot wait to step into the pulpit at my church and deliver that which has been simmering in me for the past week (and, in essence, for my entire Christian experience!). The prayer, the study, the compilation—ultimately coming to fruition in prayerful delivery, aiming to be clear and to put the groceries on the bottom shelf. (Not sure what that means?)

Sunday afternoons, however, are more exhausting than at any other time of the week. I'm not in bad shape, mind you. I exercise, eat well, and have plenty of energy for the task to which Christ called me. So why do I feel exhausted?

Turns out I'm not alone! (I agree!) Faithful pastors all over feel this way after preaching on Sunday. Some outsiders may say that there is something unspiritual about the pastor who endures this. However, this is not so by and large.

So why do most pastors and preachers feel so exhausted after preaching?

It's Work! *It's a labor of love, to be sure—but it's still labor. Studies have shown that the energy used for preaching a 30 minute sermon is the equivalent of an 8-hour work day!"* For me that is still about 4 hours labour!

We can all be tired. It is part of life, but there is a huge difference between tiredness, as a result of something we choose to do. Say, a day in the garden, a tour of the shops (we

not be my choice!), a long walk or watching the grand children. At the end of the day, we might flop into our chair and say I'm jiggered, but we can still say, we have had a good day. That feeling of tiredness, is totally different from what the prophet Isaiah is saying; I remind you of his words.

He strengthens those who are weak and tired.

³⁰ *Even those who are young grow weak;
young people can fall exhausted.*

³¹ *But those who trust in the LORD for help
will find their strength renewed.*

They will rise on wings like eagles;

they will run and not get weary;

they will walk and not grow weak (Isaiah 40: 29-31)

Imagine people at their absolute lowest ebb. Mentally, spiritually shattered at what life has thrown at them. Wondering just how they are going to cope. There seems no tomorrow. It does not exist. They only have their feelings of 'now'. Those feelings might be emptiness. In the midst of their lives is a huge void. A great big large whole of 'nothing'. They feel alone. There is no one to share the burden. This is the kind of tiredness described by Isaiah, where young men grow weak and fall exhausted. This is not a tiredness of the body. It is where minds and hearts feel that can go no further. The tragedy of suicide in our society. Parents, family of a young person indiscriminately murdered in the Manchester arena. People living with deep depression. It describes anyone who finds themselves in a living hell.

The context of Isaiah chapter 40 is one of exile. The sometimes despondent, sometimes hopeful Jewish community exiled through a forced deportation around 587 BC, and now living in Babylon. Some have adapted to their new environment, but there were those weary of captivity and dreamt of a return home to Jerusalem. No doubt some felt that God had just forgotten all about them. I am stuck in this hell hole. God, where are you?

One thing about humanity is this, we are good at complaining. We do it all the time. To the people of Israel, in exile in Babylon, who were complaining about God, Isaiah says, your God is the God of creation and he knows your troubles, sufferings, pain and injustices. If we feel that we are in some form of 'captivity' or 'exile'. That promise of God is for us. Isaiah says, our God never grows tired or weary. You can see where he is going with this. He is contrasting the fragility / frailty of humankind, with the majesty and holiness of God.

It is almost as if Isaiah is saying to the people, God is holding you in this place for a reason. This is not just a time of exile and all the pain that goes with it, it is a time for transformation and change. I can understand, and you might be thinking, why people might respond to God and say, I do not want to be in this place. In the dark difficult places, when your focus is on just surviving and getting through to the next day, you can't see the big picture. That is where God's message of hope comes in.

One of my old university professors said, true prophecy, with all its challenges, must contain a word of hope. For the exilic community in Babylon, their future hope and promise, unlikely to many, was to return home to Jerusalem and these are the words of the prophet to the people.

"We do not know what lies ahead, the way we cannot see, but one stands there to be my guide, and in his arms I'll be,"

Being a follower of Jesus is about living in the present, good times and bad. But at the same time, having as our faith, the knowledge that the things we cannot see, are already held for us, in the arms of God. Enabling us, in the moments of greatest tiredness and despair to still rise up on wings, as eagles. This Pentecost Sunday, what greater picture can there be, than that of soaring in the slip stream of the spirit of God. Amen.