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Grace and Holy Trinity Church
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Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

After a long day at work or school it's easy to collapse into our favorite spot, sigh, and turn on the TV to watch whatever it is that people over the age of 3 watch these days. It's easy to veg out because our minds and bodies have been working hard on any given day. It's essential to take some time to recover from the stress and of life. Sometimes taking an hour or so to watch a show, read a book, listen to a podcast, snuggle up on the couch with a cup of tea is enough to help us restore our energy and get ready for the next part of the day.

Sometimes it isn't. Sometimes being tired compounds into fatigue and exhaustion. The body literally begins to shut down it is painful, disorienting, and overwhelming. According to the Mayo Clinic some symptoms of chronic fatigue are Loss of memory or concentration; Sore throat; Enlarged lymph nodes; Unexplained muscle pain; Pain that moves from one joint to another without swelling or redness; Headache of a new type, pattern or severity; Unrefreshing sleep; Extreme exhaustion lasting more than 24 hours after physical or mental exercise.¹ There are certain seasons in life when exhaustion is more likely to occur. For instance when being the primary caregiver for others either children or elders; living with individuals suffering with mental, terminal or chronic illness, or addiction; suffering from one's own health related issues. To everything there is a time and a purpose, including weariness . There is no one who is immune to being worn down- being wearied by the changes and chances of this life is par for the course as the authors of the prayers for Compline knew.

¹ Accessed 7/6/17

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/chronic-fatigue-syndrome/basics/symptoms/con-20022009>

I believe that the prayer Be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this life may rest in your eternal changelessness; through Jesus Christ our Lord is *included in the last liturgy for the day because it is during* the deep dark quietness of the night when the toil takes its toll.

God knows our tiredness, our weariness and our frustration and wants us to remember that we don't have to muscle through. We don't have to keep on keepin on. We don't have to have that "stick to it-ive ness" that self help books profess to be the answer to everything.

We are members of a community of faith. We are members of the congregation of saints and even when we feel like all the work we have done has come to naught- when we have played our flutes and no one danced and when we have wailed and no one mourned alongside us- we are not alone. No one is alone.

The work we do is in pursuit of the Kingdom of God, the work we do is intended to bring about the Glory of God, the work we do is meant to bring about the reconciliation of this beloved creation to God. It is not full of praise and recognition by those who ignore God at best and deny God at worst. The work we do is not lauded as perfect and necessary and fruitful. The work we do in the name of God is often overlooked undervalued and frivolous to those who do not believe.

We work hard, thanklessly, trying to bring folks to know God by professions of faith, by prayers and praises, by actions in the world. Our thanks does not come from our brothers and sisters, those to whom we are yoked in our ministries, but rather our thanks comes from God who guarantees rest for the weary. Renewal for the exhausted. Reconciliation for those who have strayed from the path.

I have often said that the Episcopal Church is the best kept secret in the Church. We have long stood with the hungry, the homeless, the refugee, the victim of oppression and violence and hatred, we have protested and marched and voted all the while keeping our mouths shut about why we do what we do.

I learned about this “secret” history of who we are and what we do when I had the privilege of spending hours with the retired Bishop of Newark, The Right Rev. John Cronenberger, learning about the unwritten history of the Episcopal Church, through his memories and stories. I had no idea that our priests and parishioners were on the front lines of the Women's rights, Civil Rights, LGBTQIA+ Rights and Environmental Conservation movements. Our role in these movements was not political, it was spiritual, according to Bishop Jack, it wasn't about shouting from the pulpit, it was about demonstrating love for one another and creation and doing the work we were given to do in our baptism. It was about living the Gospel.

Generations of folks in the Episcopal Church did this work quietly, did this work devotedly, did this work without saying why, because they thought it was self evident. Everybody must know that, we love our neighbors because God loves us so much that he sent his son to die for us.

Everyone knows we respect the dignity of every human being because we love Jesus, right? Truth is, no one knows we love Jesus and that we are doing something because we love Jesus, unless we say so. When Episcopalians in general are doing the work feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting with those who are oppressed and we just expect others to join us in the work and make the job easier, without explaining why we do what we do and how we do it.

In the 21st Century this model of doing the work God has given us to do and just expecting others to know that we are fulfilling the commandments of Jesus has passed. According to the nonprofit organization Hands on Greater Richmond's volunteer database there are currently 9 opportunities to serve in feeding programs within 5 miles of Grace and Holy Trinity Church. One of those, our Red Door Ministry, is the only program which lists the love of Jesus as a reason for the ministry people feed the hungry, clothe the naked, stand with the oppressed for many reasons, and the love of Jesus is only one of them in the

contemporary context, we need to do the work and claim our reason for doing the work.

Jesus' tells us in today's Gospel when individuals try do the work of the Kingdom, without asking for help from God, without coming back to God for sustenance, direction and refreshment, without the support of others in ministry, individuals are bound to be beaten down, worn out and exhausted. Ministry is not a solo act, but the role of an ensemble cast. Like members of a choir who stagger their breathing to make a sustained note last longer than any one person can, in ministry we all must take moments to restore our souls while others continue to do the work of Jesus' name.

Jesus assures us in today's gospel that being tired is not shameful. Being spiritually exhausted is nothing to be kept secret. Rather we should openly and honestly tell one another when we are in need of a break and invite others to take up the yoke when we are too tired to go on. Do not be ashamed to ask for help when we need it. Be more like children in our ministry as Jesus reminds us yet again to do in our spiritual lives what children do innately.

Children know what they can and cannot do and are not afraid to ask for help. When a child is frustrated or tired or doubts their ability they are not ashamed to crawl into their parent's lap seeking solace and comfort. A child is not too proud to ask for help when they need it, a child does not shy away for asking for the assistance they need when they need it and specifically ask for what they need.

We as Children of God should be more like children calling to one another and to God and finding answers to needs as soon as they arise. My question to you today, as a fellow child of God, is what do you need? In your life and work, what do you need? Do you need rest? Do you need rejuvenation? Do you need support? God will provide whatever it is that you need, all you need to do is ask. What are you asking for as you come to the Table today?

I invite you to take the next minute to sit with God and rest knowing that there is support in the Kingdom's work, that there are others who care about what you care about, there are others who are doing the work that you are called to, you are not alone.

1 minute silence

The person sitting to your left and to your right, the person in front and behind you, the person across the aisle and in the Cathedral down the street. All of us who are called Christians, all of us who are marked as Christ's own forever, all of us who are toiling in hopes that what we do will make God joyful and happy, all of us who receive grace from God almighty and rest in the eternal changelessness of Jesus' love and the Holy Spirit's inspiration, we are all called to work together to bring God's creation into being. We are not called to work alone in silos, but to work together in community. When we are playing our flutes and singing our songs of lament and wondering why no one is dancing and wondering why no one is wailing we need to take stock and we may need to take a break so that we can be renewed and refreshed. Isn't that part of why we come to the Eucharist? Let us come to the table seeking solace and strength, pardon and renewal Let the grace of Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ, that we may worthily serve the world in Jesus name².
Amen

² Paraphrase of Eucharistic Prayer C in the Book of Common Prayer