

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, December 3, 2023

"How Does a Weary World Rejoice? We Acknowledge Our Weariness"

"Young at Heart" Message

As I was preparing for today's message, and for this Advent series that asks the question: How does a weary world rejoice?, I was trying to think of fun and creative ways to illustrate the point I want to make.



And I thought... what better way to do that than by embarrassing myself?

So, that's how we'll start today's message.

I think I've mentioned this to several of you, but I started rock climbing when I moved to Calgary.

It started out as something fun and new to try.

Here is me on one of my first days climbing.

Here I am, quite stuck on this corner climb.

Yes, I am nearly parallel to the floor, trying to figure out my next move.

This is the definition of weary, at least in terms of climbing.

I don't know that I made it out of that corner, and I am pretty sure I failed that climb.



Now, that climb was still quite early on in my climbing adventure.

I've been climbing for several months now, so one would think I'm getting better at it. You might think I wouldn't get stuck, or nearly as tired or need to rest nearly as much.

But, you would be wrong, let me tell you!

Here is a sequence of photos of me climbing a – supposedly – relatively easy climb.

These photos were taken last Sunday afternoon.

Here I am starting the climb. I look weary already!

I got on the wall...



...and promptly needed a rest.

I'm about 5 feet off the ground here.

Ah, I'm back to climbing after a rest...



... and resting again.

Also wondering how far to the top?



Getting closer...



... aaaand resting again.



There we go – I finally did it!



There's, unfortunately, photo evidence of my weariness during this climb.

I had to rest quite a few times.

And, there are times when I start to feel ashamed or embarrassed when I have to rest that much.

I watch my climbing partners just scale those walls like they're climbing a short ladder. No problem at all for them, but I struggle.

But, here is what I've learned from climbing:

It does me no good to compare my climbs to someone else's.

What makes me weary is not the same as what makes someone else weary.

I learn something every time I climb, and I get stronger every time I rest in my weariness - both physically and mentally.

I may not be able to zoom up a climbing wall like my climbing partners. I may have to rest more than they do. I may not always make it up the wall at all.

But, in the words of Miley Cyrus,
*"There's always gonna be another mountain
I'm always gonna wanna make it move
Always gonna be an uphill battle
Sometimes I'm gonna have to lose
Ain't about how fast I get there
Ain't about what's waiting on the other side
It's the climb"*

And, guess what? That sequence I showed you earlier with a whole bunch of rests?

That was from last Sunday.

And, here's a photo from this past Thursday:



That is me doing a climb in that corner where I was almost completely parallel to the ground.

This climb is the hardest climb level I've reached thus far.

And yes, I did make it to the top, although there's no photo evidence of it. But I was proud of myself for doing this climb.

Despite my weariness on Sunday, by Thursday, I'd made significant strides toward harder climbs.

And taking those opportunities to rest on Sunday, setting aside my shame and embarrassment, and focusing on my own journey and no one else's, allowed me to get to the top of this wall.

So, I return to the question this series poses:

How does a weary world rejoice?

The Message

Today we begin an Advent series titled "How Does a Weary World Rejoice?" Each week of the series, which includes the Sunday after Christmas as well, we offer a response to that initial question.

This week's response is: We acknowledge our weariness.

About a week ago, Facebook reminded me of a post I made at the end of 2020.

In the post, I said something to the effect of "boy, this has been a long and rough year, but I feel a little more myself now, and here are the things I am grateful for despite the challenges this year has brought."

In reading that post now, I could feel the weariness pouring out of my past self. I felt sad for the Jamie of 2020, and that memory triggered some hard feelings.

It was like I was right back there, feeling the weight of weariness and overwhelm crash down around me.

And it made me wonder how I ever managed to get through that period in my life.

How did any of us get through it? My journey through the last four years hasn't been the same as everyone else's, but I suspect that nearly everyone felt a similar sense of weariness.

And, in many ways, we still feel it.

Even as I read today's scripture, it was easy to identify with the weariness that Zechariah and Elizabeth were feeling.

In a time when a woman's worth was attributed largely to her ability to have children, Zechariah and Elizabeth suffered many years carrying the weight of their infertility.

So many women and couples today suffer from the same weariness.

This is, of course, is not the only thing that can cause weariness.

We can be weary because of our age.

We can be weary because of our waiting for something that may or may not ever come.

We can be weary from facing the same routine day after day, year after year, and seeing very little change in our life.

We can be weary from our job, our kids, our family, our home that's in need of repair, our vehicle that's just about at the end of its life, our health that always seems to be failing... and so many other things.

Today, it is important that we acknowledge our weariness. What is it that causes weariness for you? What causes grief, rage, or hopelessness?

Remember that your weariness is not the same as anyone else's.

There is no shame in whatever it is that is causing your weariness. There is no shame if that weariness is caused by grief, anger, or hopelessness.

This is your journey, and it does no good to compare it to anyone else's or to feel bad about whatever it is that is causing you to feel weary.

In our scripture today, we read this beautiful story of hope. In their weariness and hopelessness, an angel comes to Zechariah.

That angel gives him hope he hadn't had in a very long time. Zechariah is in the middle of a tough climb, ready to give up, and this angel comes and says "keep climbing, Zechariah. Your goal is in sight."

And Zechariah responds to the angel by essentially saying, "umm, Gabriel is it? We're quite old and have been climbing a long time. We've rested in our

weariness, and now you're telling us to keep going? How do I know we'll ever actually reach the top?"

And that's a totally fair response!

The angel punishes Zechariah a little bit for questioning him and tells him he won't be able to speak until the child is born.

I could preach about tests of faith, and trusting God. But I want to stick with this message about rejoicing in weariness instead.

Sometimes, we may be in the middle of a climb and something gives us hope and encouragement to keep going.

A metaphorical (or very real) angel might whisper in our ear to keep going, we're almost there.

And that angel might just give us the strength to keep going. We might need to rest many times, but we may just get to the top of that climb in the end.



But, there are other times when we might be completely stuck.

No matter how much Gabriel tells me to keep going, in this moment, it just isn't possible.

I'm too tired, and too off track from my goal.

An angel could be sitting right on my shoulder, whispering in my ear that I can do it, and in that moment, I know I simply can't.

And there is absolutely nothing wrong with that.

In these moments of weariness, when we just cannot imagine reaching our goal, or finishing our climb, it is OK to stop, reset, or climb back down.

It is these moments that help us reset our expectations. We learn from them. We take a step back and look at how far we did get.

Those moments of challenge or struggle, or even of stopping completely and taking a step back provide us with more experience.

The blood, sweat, and tears we shed while stuck or too weary to continue help us to learn and prepare for the next climb.

Whether that climb is a literal climb or a metaphorical one, acknowledging our weariness in the moment and recognizing those times when we need to rest, or when we need to stop all together, is important.



We're able to rejoice in our weariness in all of these scenarios. If we make it to the top easily, or with a lot of rest along the way, we can rejoice in making it to the top.

And if we have to stop and reset, we can rejoice in the fact that we tried. Or perhaps in the fact that our feet are once again firmly on the ground.

We can rejoice either way, because we are also made for joy.

Joy can and does exist alongside the full range of other emotions we experience.

Sometimes, weariness can harden us and prevent us from living fully into joy. We saw this with Zechariah – he struggled to believe in the hope the angel Gabriel offered him.

He had allowed his weariness to overpower his joy, and so he spent Elizabeth's pregnancy in silence.

If nothing else, this period of silence gave him time to think about and acknowledge his weariness from waiting and his joy in the hope they were given.

Like Zechariah and Elizabeth, we have had hard journeys. Grief has left us with scars.

This is how we show up to Advent, and there is no shame in our scars or our weariness.

But there can be joy. And, there can be tremendous hope in our weariness. There are also opportunities for learning and growth.

Like me when I climb, sometimes, we need to rest when we are weary. Sometimes, we need to acknowledge that we are struggling, and we need to feel safe enough to do that.

Sometimes, we need to ask for guidance – either from someone we love and trust, or from God, or both. God speaks to us in all kinds of ways, and often, that is through someone else.

And even as we acknowledge that weariness, we need to be able to live into our joy as well. We need to remember that joy can exist right alongside our weariness.

Joy can be found in so many little things.

A morning cup of coffee. A good book. A walk with a friend. A piece of artwork. A snowflake (or lots of snowflakes). A beloved family member or pet. The crunch of leaves under your feet. The sunshine on a cold day. The smile from the stranger next to you.

How does a weary world rejoice?

We acknowledge our weariness AND we acknowledge the things that bring us joy even as we sit in our weariness, because joy can exist alongside weariness.

As we prepare our hearts for communion today, I invite you to set the things that make you weary at the feet of Jesus. Allow yourself to receive the grace and the joy that is set at the table for you.

Rest your weariness at the feet of Jesus by naming it rather than feeling ashamed or embarrassed by it.

Jesus welcomes you to His table in all of your weariness, grief, and hopelessness, and also in all of your joy.

May you open your heart to receive the grace that Jesus offers as you rest your weariness at His feet. Amen.

God of Joy and Love, as we enter into this period of waiting, we ask that you help us acknowledge our weariness. Help us to be aware of the areas of our bodies and minds that are worn out, hurting, or in need of your tender care. Once we are aware, we can work on restoration. And as we do so, help us remember to be joyful even as we are aware of our weariness. May the joy fill us, enter into the parts of our bodies and minds that are holding our weariness. God, we ask that you would be part of that joy that fills us and sustains us. In your holy name we pray. Amen.