

Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Reno, NV

Pastor Scott Trevithick

Date: December 3, 2023, Year B, Advent 1

Text: Luke 1:1-23

Title: "We Acknowledge our Weariness" or Are You Weary?

Focus: Life can be filled with loss and other challenges which make us weary. When we are weary, it is good to acknowledge it. Scripture acknowledges weariness.

From *A Sanctified Art*: As Advent begins, we start by acknowledging the weariness, grief, rage, and hopelessness we carry—and we also affirm that we are made for joy. Joy is designed to live in a full house of other emotions. We start the season with Zechariah and Elizabeth; they have battled infertility and have lived many years steadfast in their faith. Perhaps they feel the weight of hopes and dreams unattained. The angel comes to Zechariah with a promise of good news, but Zechariah can't fully receive it, and he is cast into silence for the duration of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Sometimes weariness can harden us and prevent us from living fully. We've had hard journeys. Grief has left a scar on us. Let us acknowledge the ways we, too, are hardened by disbelief. Like the psalmist, let us ask, "how long?" and plead for restoration.

Gospel Reading: Luke 1:1-23

¹Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, ²just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

⁵In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. ⁷But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

⁸Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, ⁹he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. ¹⁰Now at the time of the incense-offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. ¹¹Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. ¹³But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. ¹⁴You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong

drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.’ ¹⁸Zechariah said to the angel, ‘How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.’ ¹⁹The angel replied, ‘I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.’

21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. ²²When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. ²³When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

Sanctified Art Advent Theme: How Does a Weary World Rejoice?

Are You Weary?

For this Advent season, we are using resources from *A Sanctified Art* that ask, **“How does a Weary World Rejoice?”** This theme recognizes that in the incarnation, in the Word becoming flesh, that in Jesus being Emmanuel, God with us, that Jesus was himself born into a weary world. Here is some of the world into which Jesus was born:

- King Herod, the regional ruler, was known for his ruthlessness. He would take immediate steps to squash any threat to his authoritarian rule. (Matthew 2 describes how Joseph and Mary and Jesus would flee to Egypt to escape Herod.)
- The Romans treated the people of Israel with contempt.
- Harsh taxes and land seizures meant that poverty and subsistence farming were the norm.

And yet the birth of Jesus was announced as “bringing good news of great joy for all the people.” Joy and weariness could be side-by-side.

- **Does that theme resonate with you? Are you feeling weary? Are you looking for joy in the midst of weariness?** Then this time is for you.

What is the difference between being “tired” and being “weary?”

(A question posed to leaders on the community page of *A Sanctified Art*. Here are some responses.)

- Being tired is going to bed right after my toddler because we have had such a full day.
 - Being weary is the constant of parenting alone, in a society that claims to love children yet treats them with disdain (and the judgement that comes from being alone.)
- Tired is when your body says, “Give me a break/nap/recovery time.”
 - Being weary is when your mind and heart say, “Please stop—no more piling on of woes and troubles—my soul is overwhelmed and depleted.”
- Being weary is a daily grind whose end is not in sight.
- Being tired is “I need a nap.”
 - Being weary is “No amount of sleep can fix the way I’m feeling right now.”
- Being tired is what I feel as I recover from COVID and know that I need more rest than usual.
 - Being weary is reading the news and knowing that the world has the same struggles with war now as it had in Jesus’ day and wanting it to be different and not seeing how it ever will be.
- Overcoming tired is something you have the power to address alone.
 - Overcoming weary requires changing things beyond one person’s control.

Are you feeling weary? What is weary to you?

- Is it the weight you bear from isolation and depression?
- Is it parenting demands or shouldering other responsibilities on your own?
- Is it uncertainty with your health or that of a loved one?
 - Nagging pain which has no explanation or diagnosis.
 - Is it so many problems you fear what’s going to happen next?
 - Is it waiting, always waiting. . . for an appointment, for a test, for test results, for information that you can count on.
- Is it being a caregiver for a family member. . .
 - The constancy of that role.
 - Is it the way that doubt can creep in, despite the effort you make, is there also the doubt or dread or worry that tugs at you—“Could I or should I be doing this or could I or should I be doing this differently or more?”
- Is your weariness from seeing a loved one slip away, progressively becoming less and less like the one you have known as dementia or other debilitating condition takes more and more?
- Is it the loss you feel from a loved one’s death or the thought of walking from Thanksgiving through Christmas while bearing such a loss?
- Does it make you weary to absorb “the news?”
 - Political turmoil

- Violence: gun violence, domestic violence, international violence. . .
- Harming of children and innocent people by threat, displacement, creating uninhabitable conditions, holding hostage, and direct physical harm.
- Within the community of Good Shepherd, is it the collective death of 12 saints from All Saints 2022 to 2023 and then 3 more deaths in the month of November since then?
 - I am weary.
- Are you weary?

“How Does a Weary World Rejoice?” Can joy and weary be side-by side?

Recall our Call to Worship today. It is just as much an “Affirmation of Faith” as it is a “Call to Worship” for what it declares about who God is and who we are in light of our relationship with God.

In God’s house, we can be joyful.

We can be grateful.

We can be hopeful.

In God’s house, we can be weary.

We can be anxious.

We can be grieving.

In God’s house, we can be honest—

inspired or tired, delighted or doubtful, connected or curious, and everything in between.

This is God’s house. You are welcome exactly as you are.

What I hear is **“If you are weary, you are welcome here.”** It is okay to be weary or say you are weary. We all experience loss. We all bear burdens.

I have been with people who are bearing a loss. Tears may come to their eyes and they begin to cry. Sometimes you will hear people say, “I’m sorry,” as though there is something wrong with crying.

You may need a safe place or the right time to cry. As the Call to Worship says, **“In God’s house, we can be honest.”** If we are weary, it is okay to say we are weary.

Another affirmation I hear in the Call to Worship is **We can be joyful and weary at the same time.**

Does that sound odd to you or incongruent—like those can’t go together?

Joy and Sadness at the time of Loss

I recall being with my brother John and my sister Agda when my Grandma T was in the hospital. She was nearing her 90th birthday and there were multiple physical and medical challenges that more tests, more medicine, more procedures weren't going to solve. She told her doctor she wanted no more tests and no more poking and prodding.

This was a time when I saw joy and weariness side-by-side. We told stories and we laughed and we wiped tears from our eyes.

- We remembered birthdays—sometimes at a birthday celebration, Grandma T would give gifts to others when it wasn't their birthday. She called it "Share the Birthday."
 - When family couldn't be together for someone's upcoming birthday, she'd order a slice of cake or scoop of ice cream when we were out for lunch or dinner even if the birthdate was 2 or 3 months away. When my sister was dating her now-husband Tom, he was so startled by cake and everyone singing when his birthday wasn't for months. Grandma T had told our waitress it was Tom's birthday.
- We remembered her picking us up from elementary school and staying the weekend at her house.
- We remembered when my sister said, "Grandma, I fixed your clock," when it wasn't broken, and thereafter never worked again.
- We remembered baking peanut butter cookies and making Chex Mix and Grandma T's Dill Dip.

And it was sad because the end of her life was near. And there was joy because her love had so shaped our childhoods and our growing up that we were grateful. Joy and sadness or weariness were hand-in-hand.

I have been with others who have experienced a loss for whom joy and sadness or the weight of grief were hand-in-hand, side-by-side.

Zechariah and Elizabeth Were Weary

This Call to Worship affirming that it is okay to be weary or that joy and grief can be side-by-side draws from stories in Scripture like this one in Luke about Zechariah and Elizabeth. People in scripture were real people who knew loss, who knew weariness.

- Their weariness or the loss that they experienced came from wanting a child to be a part of their lives.

¹³But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John.

- **Here is what is intriguing to me:** There is no mention of Zechariah having prayed and yet the angel refers to his prayer and then makes the promise that he and Elizabeth will have a child.
 - What is the longing of his heart—an unspoken prayer?
 - What is our unspoken prayer?

¹⁸**Zechariah said to the angel, ‘How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.’**

I think if I were Zechariah, I’d want to know the same thing. “How can this be?!”

What he says sounds a lot like Mary—in this same chapter in Luke, who says,

- ³⁴**Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’**

I wonder what was different between the two—the difference between how they each expressed surprise or confusion. Was Zechariah so weary he couldn’t hear this news as good news or as hope that God’s love could break in in an unexpected way?

When we are weary, let us still be ready to hear good news.

Here are more reflective words from *A Sanctified Art* that continue to sound like an Affirmation of Faith:

Remind us of Zechariah and Elizabeth.

Remind us that your good news knows no bounds.

This is good news:

no matter how many times we wear ourselves thin,

no matter how many times we lose ourselves to distractions,

no matter how many times we ask ourselves, “*How can this be?*”

God’s love keeps showing up for us.

Know that

We are loved.

We are claimed.

We are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.