

On Exhaustion

I have come to believe that there are two different kinds of exhaustion: the kind that gets better with rest, and the kind that doesn't.

The first kind of exhaustion is, I hope, a familiar one. It is the exhaustion that I would imagine more than a few of us feel in this week following Easter. It is the exhaustion of a marathon runner at the end of a race. Or the exhaustion that a family feels coming home at the end of an action-packed vacation. It is a kind of deep, crash-out-in-bed-and-don't-move-for-three-days bone-tiredness that is mingled with a sense of gratitude, fullness, wholeness, resonance.

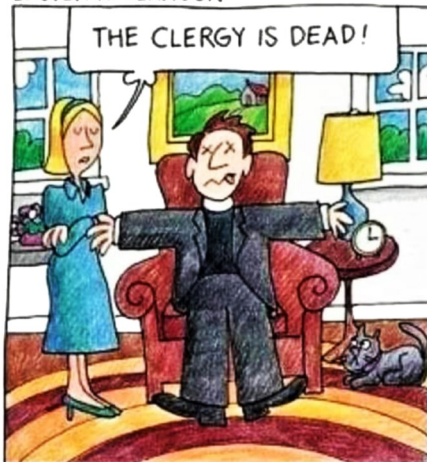
The second kind of exhaustion is one with which we may also be all-too familiar. This is the kind of exhaustion that I felt when pastoring a three-point charge through the COVID-19 pandemic; the kind of exhaustion that has led to so much clergy burnout over the last few years. In this kind of exhaustion, naps, Sabbath days, and vacation time – while certainly a good idea – don't help much. It is an exhaustion that is accompanied by a sense of emptiness in perpetuity. A lasting fatigue with no end in sight.

In his book *Crossing the Unknown Sea*, the poet David Whyte, riddled by exhaustion, tells the story of meeting with a spiritual companion. In their conversation, Whyte's friend tells him "You know that the

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antidote to exhaustion is not necessarily rest? [...] The antidote to exhaustion is wholeheartedness." He then goes further:

“You are so tired through and through because a good half of what you do here in this organization has nothing to do with your true powers, or the place you have reached in your life. You are only half here, and half here will kill you after a while. You need something to which you can give your full powers.¹

In traditional yogic teaching, the Sanskrit word for suffering is *dukham*, literally translated as “a wheel out of alignment.” Thus, suffering arises when something deep within the core of our being is “mis-aligned,” throwing off our internal and external balance and keeping us from being wholeheartedly present. Conversely, the opposite of *dukham* is *sukham*, a sweetness or “quiet joy” that comes from being “unstuck.”

So as we journey through this Easter season, seeking a rest that truly restores; searching after the joy of resurrection pouring into our day-to-day life, may we find within our souls a sweet space of grounding, alignment, and wholehearted resonance.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How would you describe the quality of your rest in this season of life? Are you finding it restful?
2. Where are you experiencing wholeheartedness in your life and/or ministry in this season?
3. Where are you experiencing “misalignment” or the feeling of being “only half here” in your life? What needs to shift to allow you to become wholeheartedly present?

¹David Whyte, *Crossing the Unknown Sea: Work as a Pilgrimage of Identity* (Riverhead Books, 2001), p. 132.