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*Isaiah 35:4-7a; Psalm 146; James 2:1-17; Mark 7:24-37*

Jesus was exhausted and cranky. At least that's what I'm picking up from the gospel story today. Up to this point in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus has preached throughout Galilee; called 12 disciples; healed a paralytic, the Gerasene demoniac, a 12-year-old girl, a hemorrhaging woman, and all the sick in Gennesaret; he has stilled a storm, fed 5,000 people, walked on water, and answered a whole bunch of questions and told a whole bunch of parables. And we're only up to chapter 7 in the Gospel of Mark. In the story we heard today, Jesus set out and went *away* to the region of Tyre, which is a seaside town on the Mediterranean Sea far north of Galilee. Jesus needed to get away.

The gospel says he entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. But, as the gospel also says, he could not escape notice, and a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. And that's when Jesus showed his very human side—a side I'm sure you and I know quite well. When we're exhausted and trying to get away and someone keeps badgering us for something they need, we get cranky. Jesus was basically at his wits end here and compared this woman—a woman from outside his own culture—to a dog, which essentially was an ethnic slur. But this woman stands up to Jesus, knowing that she and her daughter were worthy of respect and healing.

Even in the middle of a desperate woman's determination and the exhaustion of Jesus, there was healing.

I'm guessing Jesus was still trying to get away in the next part of the story, since it says Jesus went by the way of Sidon to the region of the Decapolis, which means he first went north about 20 miles up the coast before turning around and going inland about 60 miles south. Jesus was probably still tired and cranky, because when he got there and a mob of people brought a deaf man to Jesus, Jesus took him away from the crowd and the gospel says *he sighed* when he put his fingers in the man's ears to free them. Exhausted and cranky Jesus sighed. And then, of course, when Jesus told the crowd not to tell anyone that he had healed the man, the gospel says "the more zealously they proclaimed it."

But even in the midst of a crowd that didn't listen, and an exhausted, exasperated Jesus, there was healing.

These are probably some of the stories in scripture in which we can actually most relate to Jesus. We all can relate to being exhausted and cranky. Exhausted from everything going on in the world – the horrific natural disasters fueled by climate change, the desperation of those trying to flee Afghanistan, the ongoing slog of a pandemic that seems like it will never come to an end.

Maybe you're exhausted from the physical diagnoses you have received or the injuries you have endured. Maybe you're already exhausted and cranky from a school year that's only just begun.

I'll tell you that I'm exhausted and probably cranky from trying to navigate ministry in the midst of an ongoing pandemic, where every decision, every event, everything I am planning is far more stressful and takes more time.

In the midst of exhaustion, I need healing, we all need healing.

It's an interesting week to think about exhaustion. This week we all will be reminded again of the tragedy that happened 20 years ago on September 11, 2001. For those who were alive and old enough to remember, do you remember feeling numb and exhausted after

9/11? That day and the days that followed we all felt broken, lifeless, angry, and lost.

We watched burning buildings collapse and viscerally felt the devastation, even if we were thousands of miles away.

Now I can't know for sure, but I'm guessing those who originally heard the prophet Isaiah, like we did today in our first reading, were also feeling exhausted, numb, broken, and lost. Isaiah was written for God's people who had just been through conflicts, destruction, and exile with both Assyria and Babylon. They were deeply yearning for a world different than what they had experienced for years and years. They needed healing in the midst of the ravages of imperial violence, and they longed for life amidst death.

Isaiah's words to them that we heard today in chapter 35 today were like streams of water soaking into a parched landscape: "Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God...he will come and save you.'" And then Isaiah offers this image: "the burning sand shall become a pool."

I don't know if any of you have visited Ground Zero in New York City, but even if you haven't, you may be aware that the former site of the World Trade Center, the site where buildings burned and collapsed, has now become a pool. On the footprints of the twin towers are gentle waterfalls that empty into huge reflecting pools. It's almost like Isaiah had predicted what would happen even millennia later in New York City: the burning sand shall become a pool.

As you've heard me say before, the crux of our faith is that the worst thing that can happen is never the last thing that can happen. Burning sand can become a pool. New life can come to bodies and spirits. Even in the midst of our exhaustion, we can be whole and healed.

Jesus healed and brought about new life even when he was exhausted. So how much more do you think we, who are sealed in

our baptism by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever, will receive healing when we are exhausted?

The stories we heard in the Bible today prove that even in the middle of desperation and exhaustion, there can be healing. Not even his own exhaustion can stop Jesus from healing us in the midst of *our* exhaustion.

When you are exhausted and cranky, be assured that God's mercy as shown in Jesus Christ extends to you. And as Jesus prayed with the deaf man, "ephphatha"—be opened—to the ways Jesus is healing and mending your life. Amen.