

Are you feeling tired?

I'm not talking about the kind of tired that can be cured by a night's sleep – though that can only do us good. No, I'm talking about *soul* tired.

The kind of tired that leaves you weary and exhausted before the day has even begun?

The kind of tired that may find you slipping mindlessly from channel to channel, news station to news station. Wondering to yourself, *when is this going to end?*

If you find yourself nodding your head and resonating with these questions, I promise you you're not alone...

I can't help but wonder if that's how those Israelites felt as they stood there before an old and dying Moses, The Promise Land just within reach. I wonder if, after 40 years of wandering, 40 years of struggle, if their souls felt tired. I wonder if they too found themselves muttering, *when is this going to end?*

We find ourselves in the lectionary text this morning at the conclusion of the first epic series of the bible. Deuteronomy is the final book in what is known as the Torah, or the Pentateuch, the *Five Books of Moses*, and in it Moses is delivering his final plea to Israel on behalf of God.

You see, Moses knows what those Israelites might only suspect. He knows that the work is not yet done. That though this chapter is coming to a close, their walk is far from over.

And so Moses delivers, over the course of these 34 chapters, a series of exhortations to this new generation of Israelites who have seen what it is to wander and to want, and who now stand just within reach of that great, promised land. Moses is pleading that they will continue to be faithful to the covenant of God.

Pleading that they will recognize that the way to life and rest and flourishing is – as Jesus would later affirm to those Pharisees – to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself.

Of course, even as he says these things, Moses knows – as do we – that those Israelites will fail to keep God’s commands. The memory of those who walked before them will begin to fade and they will grow tired once again.

Are you feeling tired?

In his 1963 book, *Strength to Love*, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. recounts a story of a comrade and Civil Rights Activist, who participated alongside a then young Dr. King and others in the Montgomery, AL bus boycotts of the mid 1950s. These boycotts, you may remember, were organized by black leaders of the time to protest the systemic segregation of black folk across the Jim Crow south. It would become the first large-scale demonstration of the Civil Rights Movement. Of this woman, King writes,

One of the most dedicated participants in the bus protest... was an elderly [woman] whom we affectionately called Mother Pollard. Although poverty-stricken and uneducated, she was amazingly intelligent and possessed a deep understanding of the meaning of the movement. After having walked for several weeks, she was asked if she were tired. With ungrammatical profundity, she answered, ‘My feets is tired, but my soul is rested.’

My feets is tired, but my soul is rested.

Let that sink in for a moment.

This woman – an elderly, black woman – who has spent a lifetime under the persecution and turmoil of a segregated Jim Crow south, has somehow, miraculously, managed to find and claim in that moment a deep and unrelenting rest within her soul.

You might wonder, as Dr. King did, where in the world that kind of soul satisfaction could be found in the midst of all that Mother Pollard was up against. Further on, King seems to answer this question. He writes,

On a particular Monday evening, following a tension-packed week which included being arrested and receiving numerous threatening telephone calls, I spoke at a mass meeting. I attempted to convey an overt impression of strength and courage, although I was inwardly depressed and fear-stricken.

At the end of the meeting, Mother Pollard came to the front of the church and said, 'Come here, son.' I immediately went to her and hugged her affectionately. 'Something is wrong with you,' she said. 'You didn't talk strong tonight.'

Seeking further to disguise my fears, I retorted, 'On, no, Mother Pollard, nothing is wrong. I am feeling fine as ever.'

But her insight was discerning. 'Now you can't fool me,' she said. 'I knows something is wrong....'

Before I could respond, she looked directly into my eyes and said, 'I don told you we is with you all the way.' Then her face became radiant and she said in words of quiet certainty, 'But even if we ain't with you, God's gonna take care of you....'

King continues...

Since that dreary night in 1956, Mother Pollard has passed on to glory and I have known very few quiet days. I have been tortured without and tormented within by the raging fires of tribulation. I have been forced to muster what strength and courage I have to withstand howling winds of

pain and jostling storms of adversity. But as the years have unfolded the eloquently simple words of Mother Pollard have come back again and again to give light and peace and guidance to my troubled soul. *God's gonna take care of you.*

You see, Mother Pollard knew, as Moses did, that strength for the arduous and often exhausting journey toward freedom and justice cannot come from within us alone. Rather, as the Rev. Dr. King would put it, it is our “faith [which has the power to] transform the whirlwind of despair into a warm and revising breeze of hope.”

I don't believe that, even as Moses sat atop that mountain, looking out at the Promise Land he knew he'd never see, that he felt anything but gratitude for what God had done through him, and at times, in spite of him. I believe with my whole heart that Moses died there on that mountain – feet tired by soul rested – confident that though we would continue to stumble again and again, that even as we would choose to wander, we would never be able escape the embrace of God's covenantal love toward us.

Perhaps it was Moses who spoke through Mother Pollard that word of prophetic hope: *God is with us.* God will take care of you, and will guide your feet and soothe your soul, even in the difficult journey ahead.

And my friends, there's no getting around it. The journey will indeed be difficult. And though it is crucial in these coming days they we exercise our right and privilege to vote, whatever comes of November 3rd will not be the journey's end.

Those same rights and freedom to life that Mother Pollard, and Dr King, and so many others fought for, have yet to be fully realized for our black, brown, and LGBTQ brothers and sisters. The dream of Dr. King for justice and equality for all people has not yet come to pass.

I do not know what will happen 10 days from now. But what I do know is that the work of justice has no political affiliation. The work of justice is imbued within the very scriptures and stories from which our faith was founded. Ever present in the command to love God and every stranger turned neighbor in God's boundless K-I-N *kindom*.

I know the world has done a number on us. I know our souls are weary. But my friends, the stakes are far too high for it to stay that way.

For the sake of God, the prophets, and *all* God's beloved people, we must – we *must* keep walking, though our feet grow tired.

And I know – I *know* – it is exhausting work. But my prayer for us all here today is that we would remember the stories of our ancestors who wandered this winding path before us. May we too be enlivened by the strength of those prophets, preachers, and ordinary people who came to know God intimately and spoke a language of love – justice seeking love – and whose souls were fed by the spirit of that promise: that there is hope for a better world if only we would yearn for it with our whole bodies: with our hands, our feet, and our actions motivated by love of God and neighbor.

May we too go forward from this place, knowing there is room for both tired feet and rested souls, so long as we learn to recognize this work as holy work. As holy participation in a story that has stretched on for millennia, but that remains all the more urgent today, in this very moment. May we remember the words of the prophet Moses, that the way to life and rest is through a sincere commitment to keep our covenant with God and Christ – that we would be a people that *loves the lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind*, and that *loves our neighbors as ourselves*.

May we do all that we can to etch the language of scripture and the history of the prophets, both ancient and new, into the very deepest corners our hearts. It is

there that we may indeed find that rest for our soul that Mother Pollard knew so intimately.

May we find that rest – that which will sustain us for the good, hard, *kindom* seeing work ahead. Because, my friends, like God – our feet aren't quite done with us. There is so much yet to do.

Are you ready? Moses waits for you. Joshua waits for you. Paul, Dr. King, John Lewis, Mother Pollard, Rosa Parks, Emmitt, Rodney, George, Breonna, Rayshard, Ahmaud, Summer, Heather, Botham, Philando, Michael, Tamir, and **Jesus** waits for you.

You are not alone in this journey. We are not alone.

But the work is not yet done.
Our walk is far from over.

Are you ready?
Let's go.