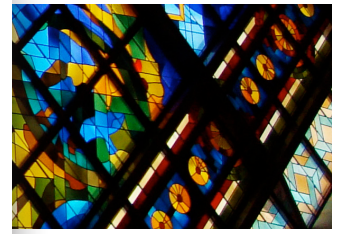




40 DAYS OF ENGAGEMENT on *Anti-Racism*



DAY 7

Racial Fatigue

Mitchell Anderson



Learning

That this piece exists at all is the product of irony: the racial fatigue I have felt these last months is precisely what has made writing this so challenging. By racial fatigue, I mean the accumulated stress, weariness, and worn out feeling that Indigenous and racialized people experience from the combination of the inherited effects of past violence and trauma, the injustices of today, and the daily experiences of being a person of colour. The topic of racial fatigue rose in importance to me after the announcement of unmarked graves at the site of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. In the days after the announcement I was trying to lead my own local congregation, participate in social and church discussions of this event, and work through my own feelings relating to my own family history with the residential school system.

I was tired. And I was tired in a way specific in some way to who I am as denēsuliné, and this made me curious if other people of colour had experiences of just being tired. And it's a tiredness, a

weariness, a fatigue that is not one single experience but the accumulation of so many that at some point begin to wear on the soul. While everyone has a different experience, what I began to call "racial fatigue" has resonances with other ideas, with what's called "minority stress" in psychology for a range of groups, or "racial battle fatigue" by William Smith, specific to Black contexts.

The Bible presents us many stories of fatigue. Hagar endures harsh treatment (Genesis 16:6,9); the enslaved Hebrews endure hard work and cruel labour in Egypt (Exodus 1:13-14); the Psalmist is tired of crying, their eyes exhausted from waiting for God (Psalm 69:3); the cry "how long" echoes in dozens of places through the Scriptures; Jesus is tired from his journeys (John 4:6); early Christian leaders endured weariness, lack of rest, and hunger (2 Corinthians 6:5). Weariness, being tired, a sense of the ongoing nature of struggle, is certainly a frequent theme in the stories of our faith.

In the midst of the unfolding announcements of unmarked

What these concepts have in common is a willingness to name and describe the cost that the accumulation of racial stressors has on someone's body and soul.

graves at multiple former residential schools, I heard that the brilliant critical scholar in English at the University of Chicago, Lauren Berlant, had passed away. They were profoundly impactful on my own thoughts, drawing my attention to the ways injustice and oppression do not only occur in the moments of crisis or the spectacular, but are woven into everyday life, into simply making do and living on. As I quietly mourned Berlant's death by reading some of their words, a phrase struck me of a motto they shared with some of their colleagues: "We refuse to be worn out."

We refuse to be worn out. Just as stories of weariness are everywhere in the Bible, so too do stories of refusal to be worn out abound: God rests upon the conclusion of God's labours of

Creation (Genesis 2:3); God rescues God's people out of slavery in Egypt (Exodus), and then gifts them the institution of weekly sabbath (Exodus 16:3-9), the cycles of every seven years of social and ecological sabbath for people and land (Leviticus 25:2-7), and, every fifty years, Jubilee to embed rest and restoration into the fabric of a more just society (Leviticus 25:8-18). The prophets promise rest to the people (Isaiah 32:15-18); Jesus takes time for sleep and recovery (Mark 6:30-32); the Holy Spirit gives people energy to continue the work of the church (Colossians 1:29). So too have Indigenous and racialized people created many ways that we refuse to be worn out.

For me these acts of refusal are as many and as ordinary as the

stressors are many and ordinary. Whether choosing to work for a church that is kind and caring, developing practices of prayer, reading, and exercise that sustain my whole being, connecting with family and friends, working to learn more about my *dënesuliné* ways of being and knowing, and relating, speaking, or recognizing that ultimately my effort is not what will achieve great change but that of the Holy Spirit at work in the world, I refuse to be worn out.

These acts of refusal, both individual and collective, are vitally important. Jesus came that all might have life in all its fullness (John 10:10). So too the forces that steal and kill and destroy are in opposition to him. But here too, Jesus' act of refusal to these powers

on the Cross transform the world and our hearts. He died for us and for the world to defeat the powers that deny life (Colossians 2:15) and rose again to new life as a sign that all our weariness and fatigue will in the fulness of time be ended in the new Creation where justice makes its home (2 Peter 3:13), where our work will bear fruit, and we will enjoy its benefits and no longer labour in vain (Isaiah 65:21-23).

The one who cried out in exhaustion (Psalm 69:3) is the same one who prayed, "You who seek God—let your hearts beat strong again because the Lord listens to the needy." (69:32b-33a)

May our hearts be strong when we grow weary, for the Lord listens to those in need.



Faith Reflection

God, you listen to your people when we are in need

Hear us when we are tired, and grant us rest

Accept us when times are harsh as you accepted Hagar

Rescue us as you did your people from Egypt.

Help us by your great power to continue in our struggles for justice

The same power that raises Jesus from death at work in our bodies

Raising us out of frustration and weariness

To proclaim your name and to live your justice.

Be with us in our refusals to be worn out

In acts of joyful resistance

In everyday commitments to our own well-being

And the good of our communities

Help us to experience the fullness of life,

And to share that life with all in the world.

Through Jesus Christ, who endured struggle and pain

To make us and the world whole

Who rises to new life

And who will raise us all to the new Creation.

Amen.



Children's Activity

As a family, brainstorm what makes you tired or grumpy. You might want to depict these by writing them down, finding pictures to represent them, or drawing images yourself. Ask, "Why do these things make you tired or grumpy?"

Then do the opposite, and brainstorm what makes you feel energized and excited. In the same way, you might want to write them

down, find pictures to represent them, or draw images of these things. Ask again, "Why do these things make you energized or excited?"

After thinking about what makes you tired or grumpy and what makes you energized and excited, think about how you can help other people. If there are things that help you be energized and excited, how can you help

other people to be energized and excited? Maybe that's sharing something nice for them, or doing something to make life a little more special, or saying thank you for what you see them doing, think about who and how you can make someone's life more energetic and exciting.



Group Commitment

Refuse to be worn out. Both individually and collectively, practice the kinds of rest and restoration that God models for us and instructs us all to practice. What practices sustain and enliven you? How can you make those more and more a part of your everyday life? At the same

time, what in life wears you down, and how can you practice refusing those things? If you're Indigenous or racialized, know how the stress of navigating both individual and collective experiences of race can be exhausting. What can you do to refuse to be worn out—to put your well being first, to find time

for rest, to engage in practices that sustain your body and spirit, to say no to things that leave you weary?

If you're not Indigenous or racialized, what would it look like to create space for your Indigenous or racialized family, friends, or colleagues to refuse to be worn out?



Advocacy

In most parts of Canada, there are few or no legal protections for sick leave. Write to your MP or MPP to advocate for sick leave protections, including ones that protect mental health. At your own places of work or study, write to decision-makers asking for provisions for sick

leave, mental health leave, or other kinds of ways of making work sustainable and recognizing when times get challenging.

Workers in federally-regulated sectors recognize the [National Day for Truth and Reconciliation](#) on September 30. Again, write to your

members of provincial legislatures for workers in provincially regulated sectors to also recognize the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. In the meantime, work in your places of work or study to recognize the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.



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