How are you today? A lot of time we answer with a vague: Fine or Good or something glib - Upright and taking nourishment.

But really, how are you? I will bet that there are a good number of you who, if you were to answer the question honestly, would say: It's been a rough week (or month or year). Things just don't seem to get any better. I take one step forward and two back. I keep telling myself that things will settle down next week. I keep telling myself that my job/marriage/relationships/ financial situation/mental health will improve, but it just does not seem to happen. There is never a moment to rest. And then I'm still wrestling with something from my past and the guilt that comes from it. I am worn out. I am weary.

And yet in the midst of your weariness, you showed up here this morning. Why? Wasn't it in part because you hoped that you might find a word of comfort here, a word to sustain the weary?

You have probably heard all sorts of words that are intended to give comfort to, to sustain the weary. Hang in there. It's always darkest right before the dawn. Every cloud has a silver lining. It has to get better, because it cannot get any worse. God would not give you this if he did not think you could handle it. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

But you are looking for something better than that this morning. You are looking for something that is more than some dime-store psychology, something more than a pithy saying. Well, you came to the right place then. The speaker of our text promises us that he has a word to sustain the weary.

But who is the speaker of our text? Although it was written by the prophet Isaiah, he is not the one speaking. Nor is it God the Father or God the Holy Spirit. Actually, the speaker here is a third party who has spoken twice before in the book of Isaiah - in chapters 40 and 49. He is identified as the servant of the Lord. When you read those sections and this one in text, it is clear that the one speaking is our Savior Jesus himself.

And what are the words that are intended to sustain the weary? He says: He wakes me up morning by morning. He wakes up my ears so that I listen like the learned. The Lord God opened my ear, and I myself was not rebellious. The speaker, Jesus, is saying that when God speaks to him, he listens. And he does so often - for he says that God wakes me up morning by morning. Daily Jesus heard and meditated upon God’s Word. I would too, wouldn’t you? Of course you know how the rest of the sentence goes - if only I wasn’t so busy. And yet I probably will not be too busy to watch the Packers-Vikings game this afternoon. For some reason, we can find the time to allow Good Morning America to waken us morning by morning, but we are too busy to allow God to do so.

But Jesus - someone who had as many things on his to-do list as you and I - managed to find time to listen to God’s Word morning by morning.

And he did not just listen to it with one ear. He did so intently, like the learned. He listened to God’s Word as though it was actually important, as though it actually mattered, as though it was of some lasting consequence.

That is so different from the way we sometimes listen to God’s Word. Sometimes we listen like those who think we have heard it all before and so cannot really be taught anything new. Sometimes we listen as though God’s Word is all fine and good and is nice for letting us escape the real world for a bit, but that is about it.

And sometimes we even listen rebelliously. That is, we do not listen as one being taught, but rather we listen as one being invited to participate in a debate, to make judgments on and
correction in what’s being taught. And at times we wouldn’t call it outright rebelliousness, but just choosiness - picking and choosing what we like and want to hear.

With that sort of selective listening, it would not be surprising if God did the same thing with us. It would not be surprising if his answer to the cry of the psalmist Oh, Lord, hear my voice; be attentive to my cry for mercy, would be along the lines of, What? Did someone say something? You pretended not to hear my Word. You rebelled against it with your words, attitude and actions. Now I will close my ears and rebel against you. In fact, God speaks of such people in Ezekiel when he says: Although they shout in my ears, I will not listen to them.

But that is not how Jesus listened to God’s Word. He listened with open ears and he did not rebel against what he heard. Think of Jesus listening with open ears when he was 12 years old sitting in the temple courts and listening to the words of the teachers, soaking it all in, asking them questions so that his open ears might hear even more. He then followed up with an obedience that showed he was not merely listening to the Word, but he was also doing it, living it, obeying it.

No, Jesus did not rebel against the words he heard - not even against the most difficult things that God commanded him to do. After saying that he has not been rebellious against God’s words, he goes on to say: I did not turn back. I submitted my back to those who beat me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard. I did not hide my face from disgrace and from spit.

There is no doubt about what Jesus is referring to here. Because it was God’s will, because he listened to and was obedient to God’s words, he did not draw back from God’s plan for him. Jesus speaks in our reading of making my face hard like flint. That pictures an attitude that says: I know that going forward is going to be tough, miserable, painful. but I will go forward.

In his gospel, Luke uses a different word to describe Jesus’ attitude. He says that he resolutely set out on that final trip to Jerusalem. Do not misunderstand that as the action of someone who knows that they have no other choice. Jesus knew that he had a choice - and yet he went RESOLUTELY. He went determined, resolved to stay the course - even when well-meaning disciples attempted to dissuade him, even when the devil tried to dissuade him by telling him he did not have to do it. But he did it because the words God had spoken to him told him that he was to suffer this.

So he went and he did not draw back. Think of Jesus’ attitude in the Garden of Gethsemane when he prayed: Not my will, but yours be done. He did not draw back from obeying God’s Words. In fact, he did the opposite of drawing back, rising from his prayer, waking his disciples and saying: Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer - and then going up boldly to the crowd that had come to arrest him, beat him, mock him and kill him.

So he went - to the humiliation of his arrest, the false accusations at his trial, the condemnation as a criminal deserving of death, the beatings, the mockings, the spitting. Imagine not rebelling against those who are beating your back and whipping off your flesh. Imagine literally turning the other cheek to those who have already pulled out your beard from your cheek. Imagine holding steady as someone spit on your face. Imagine the humiliation of hanging nearly naked on a cross with people taunting and jeering you: Come down and we will believe in you - and knowing that you could, but not doing so. And finally, wearied from it all, there was the disgrace of death.

Now, you might say: Pastor, that is a word to sustain the weary? I did not come here to be depressed. I came here to be uplifted, to be raised up!

Raised up, indeed. These are words to raise you up morning. Jesus goes on to speak the words that sustained him during that time on the cross. He says: The Lord God will help me, so I will not be disgraced. I know that I will not be put to shame. The one who will acquit me is
near! Who can accuse me? Let us take our stand. Who can pass judgment on me? Let him approach me. Look, the Lord God will help me. Who then can declare me guilty? In other words, Jesus was sustained by the confidence that in the end he would be acquitted. Earlier in his life Jesus had said to those around him: Can any of you prove my guilty of sin? Even in the last hours of his life, he was sustained by the belief that no one could prove him guilty of sin.

But you may say: But that is not how it turned out! He was put to terrible shame. He was accused of sin, tried for that sin, convicted of that sin, and put to death for that sin! That is true, but by a lower court.

And God overturned that ruling and threw it out by raising up Jesus from the dead on Easter Sunday. As Paul wrote to Timothy: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit. As for the shame, it lasted for a brief moment in time, but the exaltation to God’s right hand in heaven – that will last forever.

Those who condemned him have indeed been worn out like a garment, eaten by the moths of time and death. Yes, those who condemned Jesus have themselves been condemned. But Jesus still stands.

So how do those words about willing obedience and about vindication sustain you? Because when Jesus perfectly listened to and willingly obeyed God’s Word throughout his life, he did so in your place as a replacement for your times of disobedience. And when he willingly obeyed God and offered himself to suffering and death, he did so in your place as a complete payment for your sins. And when God raised him from the dead, when God vindicated Jesus, he also vindicated you. Paul says in Romans that God raised him to life for our justification. That is, he did so, not merely for the purpose of declaring Jesus to be justified or not guilty, but for the purpose of declaring you justified - not guilty.

So those words of Jesus that sustained him are also your words to sustain you. You will not be disgraced and you will not be put to shame. Like Jesus, you may be accused. The devil may come to you and tell you that if you are weary, you deserve it because you are guilty of sin. He may tell you that your sins condemn you, not only to weariness here on earth, but to death in hell. Tell him he is lying and that God has thrown out his verdict of condemnation. Speak to him the words of Paul - words which are very similar to the words that Jesus spoke in our text: If God is for us, who can be against us? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is interceding for us.

When you feel like the last verse of our reading, when you feel as though you are walking in the dark, as though there is no light in this world, do as Jesus did - trust in the name of the Lord and rely on your God - for he sustains the weary with his words of vindication. May they sustain you today. May they continue to sustain you throughout this entire week. And may they sustain you throughout life until one day the weary rest with him in heaven. Amen.

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