

Many Voices, One Call

“I loved it.”; “It was perfect.”; “The entire service was wonderful.”; “It was too long.”; “I can’t wait for the kintsugi project next week.”; “We didn’t have that on the calendar, better be done in time.”; “Thank you for your statement at the beginning of service last week.”; “I’m livid that anything current or political was brought into the pulpit.”; “Slow down, pause, take time to emphasize your points, give us a chance to catch up and have it sink in.”; “We went over time, you know...”; “I love your voice, the cadence.”; “You can be a bit “sing songy” sometimes.”

There is a particular kind of exhaustion that comes not from doing nothing, but from giving oneself fully and being met with many voices speaking at once. Some of those voices are generous and affirming, others critical or anxious, and still others sharply opposed to one another. Taken together, they can leave a minister feeling fragmented—pulled in competing directions, unsure which word to trust, which call to heed, and where the Spirit’s voice might be found amid the noise.

Scripture is honest about this experience. In the opening chapter of Genesis, God speaks creation into being by separating—light from darkness, land from sea, day from night (Genesis 1:3–10). But after each act of separation, God pauses, looks, and declares it good. The work is not frantic; it is spacious. By contrast, the exhaustion I feel comes when I am tempted to hold all things at once—to be both concise and expansive, prophetic and comforting, urgent and unhurried, responsive to the moment and detached from it. The feedback I receive often reflects these tensions: “It was perfect” alongside “It was too long”; gratitude for naming current pain alongside anger that it was named at all. These are not simply stylistic preferences; they reveal deep theological differences about what worship is for and what the pulpit is meant to do.

Jesus himself inhabits this tension. In the Gospels, the crowds are rarely of one mind. Some marvel at his teaching, others urge him to be quiet, still others accuse him of being dangerous or blasphemous (Luke 4:22–30; John 6:60–66). Even his closest followers misunderstand him, rush him, or attempt to redirect his mission. Yet Jesus does not organize his ministry around managing their reactions. Again and again, he withdraws to pray (Mark 1:35), slows the moment (John 8:6), or speaks a word that deepens rather than resolves the discomfort in the room. Faithfulness, not consensus, appears to be the guiding principle.

This is especially clear when Jesus is accused of bringing “politics” into sacred space. When he proclaims good news to the poor, release to the captives, and freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4:18), the reaction is swift and violent. The problem is not that Jesus is unclear; it is that he is clear about a kingdom that collides with the present order. His words are pastoral and prophetic at the same time, rooted in Scripture and responsive to lived reality. To name suffering, injustice, or death in the community is not a departure from the gospel—it is one of its most consistent expressions (Matthew 25:35–40).

Still, exhaustion remains. Elijah, after confronting the prophets of Baal and bearing the weight of his calling, collapses under a broom tree and asks God to take his life (1 Kings 19:4). God does not rebuke him for his fatigue or demand greater resilience. Instead, God provides rest, food, silence, and a voice that is not in the earthquake or fire, but in the sound of sheer silence (1 Kings 19:11–12). This story reminds me that exhaustion is not a sign of failure; it is often a sign of having shown up fully. It also reminds me that discernment does not come from reacting to every voice, but from returning—again and again—to the quieter, steadier voice of God.

Paul names a similar dynamic in his letters. Writing to the Corinthians, a community full of competing preferences and strong opinions, he insists that the church is one body with many members, none of which can claim absolute authority (1 Corinthians 12:12–26). Feedback, critique, and affirmation all belong to the life of the body—but none alone define the call. Ultimately, Paul grounds ministry not in performance or approval, but in faithfulness: “It is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy” (1 Corinthians 4:2). Trustworthiness, unlike popularity, cannot be measured in immediate reactions.

As I sit with these comments—some loving, some sharp, some contradictory—I am reminded that ministry is an act of offering, not controlling. The Word is sown broadly, as Jesus describes in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1–9). Some seed takes root quickly, some struggles, some is choked, some flourishes beyond expectation. The sower does not stand over the soil anxiously adjusting technique based on each outcome; the work is to keep sowing, trusting God with the growth.

Perhaps the invitation in this moment of exhaustion is not to fix, refine, or defend, but to rest—to let the many voices settle, to receive what is life-giving, to release what is not, and to remember that the call is not to be everything to everyone, but to be faithful to the gospel entrusted to me. As Jesus himself says, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). When ministry begins to feel otherwise, it may be time not for more effort, but for deeper listening—to God, to my own limits, and to the grace that holds us all. Above all, I am called to hold each one in the congregation in love and grace.