

When Your Body Fails and Your Heart Breaks

Isaiah 40:27–31; 2 Corinthians 4:16–18; John 11:17–27

A few years ago, I noticed something humbling. I started making noises when I stood up or walked up stairs.

You know the noises. The same noises your grandparents used to make.

You bend down to tie your shoes and suddenly there's a sound effect.

You stand up from the couch and think: **When did this happen?**

And then life gets more serious. The doctor's phone call. The unexpected diagnosis. The parent who starts forgetting names. The spouse whose health begins to decline. The empty chair at the holiday table.

And suddenly we face questions we'd rather avoid:

- What happens if my body stops cooperating?
- What happens if I become a burden?
- What happens if I lose someone I love?
- What happens when I die?

Most people avoid those questions. We stay busy. We distract ourselves. We joke our way around pain.

But avoiding fear doesn't heal fear.

And today we're talking about some of our deepest fears: **sickness, aging, and death.**

And before anyone panics ... this is not a depressing sermon.

Because Jesus has something to say even here.

This feels very real in our community. Many of you are raising kids while helping aging parents. You're attending soccer games and doctor appointments in the same week.

Some of you are caring for a spouse. Some are grieving someone you lost years ago, but the ache still shows up unexpectedly. And many of us learned during COVID how fragile life can feel.

Our culture doesn't handle this well. We spend billions trying to look younger, feel younger, and avoid conversations about mortality.

But eventually reality catches all of us.

And when it does: where do we find hope?

That's where scripture meets us today.

God does not grow tired of caring for tired people

The prophet Isaiah was speaking to exhausted people who wondered if God had forgotten them.

And God responds: *"God gives strength to the weary."*

Even strong people get tired. Caregivers get tired. Grieving people get tired. Patients get tired.

But God does not grow tired of caring for tired people.

Your exhaustion does not mean God has abandoned you.

Your body may weaken—but your soul is not abandoned

The Apostle Paul writes:

"Though outwardly we are wasting away, inwardly we are being renewed day by day."

That is remarkably honest.

Bodies age. Illness happens. Energy changes.

But your diagnosis is not your identity.

Your worth is deeper than what your body can or cannot do.

Your soul can still grow stronger even when your body grows weaker.
 What God is building in you is not wasted.

Jesus enters grief before defeating death

Jesus arrives after his friend Lazarus has died.

Lazarus' sister Martha says, "Lord, if you had been here..."

That's the question many of us carry: Why didn't you stop this?

Jesus responds: "*I am the resurrection and the life.*"

Hope is not an idea. Hope has a name.

And then Jesus weeps. He enters grief before defeating death.

He stands at the tomb. Then he calls Lazarus out.

Death is real, but death is not ultimate.

Psalm 23 puts it like this, and I suspect some of you know these words
 by heart:

*"Even though I walk through the darkest valley (or the Valley of the
 Shadow of Death), I will fear no evil, for you are with me."*

Not "even though I walk around the darkest valley." Not "even though I
 stand at the edge and look in."

Through the darkest valley.

The promise isn't that God removes us from the hard places. The
 promise is that God walks through them with us.

And the book of Revelation — the last word in scripture — closes with
 this vision:

*"God will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or
 mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

Every tear. Not some tears. Every one.

That is the God we are trusting today.

So, what do we do with this in our real, everyday lives?

1. Name your fear honestly

What are you most afraid of?

- Pain?
- Dependency?
- Memory loss?
- Losing someone?
- Being alone?

Naming it is the first act of courage.

2. Have the conversations you've been avoiding

Talk about healthcare wishes. Talk about practical plans.

Talk about what matters most. That isn't morbid.

This is one of the things people regret not doing before the time comes.

That is loving your family well.

3. Show up for someone who is hurting

- Call them.
- Visit them.
- Bring dinner.
- Sit quietly.

Presence matters more than perfect words.

4. Don't postpone the things that matter

Tell the people you love that you love them. Take the trip. Repair the relationship that needs repairing. Serve someone. Laugh deeply. Live fully.

Fear of death can keep us from truly living. But resurrection hope frees us.

5. Practice hope daily

Read the passages that anchor you, maybe some we've heard today, like Isaiah 40, Psalm 23, John 11, and Revelation 21. Let hope reshape your imagination. Not just once. Daily.

Hope is not a feeling we generate. It is a truth we return to.

Near the end of life, people rarely say:

- "I wish I worked more."
- "I wish I'd made more money."
- "I wish I had a bigger house."

Instead, they often say:

- "I wish I worried less."
- "I wish I loved better."
- "I wish I'd told them 'I love them.'"
- "I should have been kinder."
- "I wish I had truly lived."

Because Jesus has overcome death, we can live differently now.

- Cancer, Parkinson's, or other disease doesn't get the final word.
- Aging doesn't get the final word.
- Dementia or disability don't get the final word.
- Grief doesn't get the final word.
- Death doesn't get the final word.

Jesus does.

And if hope still lives, we can live fearlessly.

As we move into Communion, I invite you to take out that card in your bulletin.

On the side that reads, "**One fear I need to surrender is...**", complete the statement.

- It might be fear about your health.
- Fear about someone you love.
- Fear about aging.

- Fear about death.
- Fear about grief you haven't fully processed.
- No one else needs to read it.

As you come forward for Communion today, you're invited to bring that card forward and place it in the basket before the altar and pray at the rail, or remain seated and pray where you are.

And if you would like someone to pray with you today, our prayer team will be available.

Because you do not have to carry this alone.

And neither does your future.

It belongs to the God who still brings life out of tombs.

Amen.