What we need instead is a mindset that puts the current news within the context of an eternal perspective. The bad and good stuff happening now has all happened before and it will all happen again. Rather than fret or post yet another opinion about it, the prophet Isaiah calls us to remember that the only news that really matters is that the God who created the world in which all this news happens is still at work and will ultimately set everything right.

Isaiah wrote to a people confronted with the reality of exile, people isolated and distanced far from home, in circumstances they did not choose but which were the result of their sinful choices. In Isaiah 40:1-11, God announces through the prophet that a return from exile is on the horizon: a new exodus in which God’s people will be set free and restored. God will dwell with them once again and God will feed and protect them as a shepherd does his flock.

This is news that God’s people still need to hear, and it is the news that puts all other news into perspective. When we worry about the forces of nature threatening to overwhelm us, God reminds us that God is the Creator who “has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand” (v. 12). When the daily news focuses on the intrigue between nations, God reminds us that before God “the nations are like a drop from a bucket and are accounted as dust on the scales” (v. 15), they are “as nothing before [God]… less than nothing and emptiness” (v. 17).

The daily news consistently urges us to be concerned about our material safety and wealth, but God reminds us to be careful what we worship and to be mindful of the things over which we worry. Our anxieties can easily become our “idols,” but they cannot redeem, and they cannot compare to the surpassing glory of the God who created all things (vv. 18-20).

The glory and character of God provides us with the best news we could possibly hear. “Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?” Ask the Creator God, the one who “sits above the circle of the earth” and rules over it (vv. 21-22). The natural and human-caused calamities that dominate the news cycle are not news to God. God puts them all into perspective by taking the long view. Those rulers and newsmakers who crowd our screens are “as nothing” to God, who sees them like withered plants that are here today and gone tomorrow (vv. 23-24). No one who makes the news will ever be God’s equal, for God is the one who creates them all (vv. 25-26).

These are powerful reminders for the people of God who, like Israel, often get caught up in the news of the day and began to despair or, worse, get sucked into the world’s idolatry, fear, and intrigue. The resultant news fatigue may make us believe our plight is “hidden from the Lord” and that we are “disregarded” by God (v. 27). But it is in those dark moments that God comes shouting through once again with the good news of deliverance and salvation, grace and mercy, love and life everlasting.

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth” (v. 28). The God who created the “ends of the earth” allows nothing to escape God’s notice and will allow nothing to defeat God’s purposes for God’s good creation. No matter how bad the news seems to be, God’s purposes will win out.

God does not suffer from “news fatigue.” As Isaiah puts it, “[God] does not faint or grow weary; [God’s] understanding is unsearchable. [God] gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless” (vv. 28-29). Not only does God know the long view of God’s purposes in history, but God also offers power and strength to those who feel the fatigue of bad news in the present. Human beings may busy themselves trying to fix things or offering opinions as to who “should” be fixing things, but as the pandemic has taught us, there are limits to human knowledge and ability. If we trust only in ourselves, we are bound to experience the fatigue of despair when we fail or reach the end of our ability. The energy and idealism of youth can lead to disappointment and exhaustion when the reality sets in that we cannot “fix” the news no matter how hard we try (v. 30).

Rather than fret, fixate, or forego the news, Isaiah invites us to deal with our fatigue by considering the larger reality the Creator God declares to God’s people. Instead of “waiting” on the news by constantly refreshing our screens or scrolling through social media, Isaiah invites us to “wait for the Lord” (v. 31). That “waiting” does not mean we simply sit around and do nothing, allowing the news to continue to wash over us. To “wait” means to look to God to provide us with perspective, hope, and purpose through prayer and through immersion in God’s Word, God’s promises.

I suspect our “news fatigue” would be mitigated if we committed to spending at least as much time in prayer or study as we do scrolling through the news and social media. Spending an equivalent amount of time attending to and listening for God would afford the opportunity to put those things in perspective. Bringing our fatigue and worries to God would provide space for God’s Spirit to renew our strength to deal with the things we can do something about. Everything else we will put in God’s hands, knowing that God’s purposes will prevail.

Countering the news with a daily discipline of time spent in the presence of God will enable us to pick up a different pace of life. Do you grab your phone to check the news first thing in the morning? That is a recipe for starting the day with anxiety, rather than mounting up for the day “with wings like eagles” (v. 31). Instead, try beginning the day with Scripture and prayer before you even touch that phone or the TV remote. Allow God’s Word to nourish you and strengthen you for the day ahead, to prepare you to run the gauntlet of the day without growing weary or discouraged, and to walk steadily forward without fainting under a load of bad news. The cure for news fatigue is to begin with God’s good news first!

Prayer: You tell us in your word that if we wait on you, we will gain new strength. We pray that we would be renewed. We wait on you Lord. When we are tired and our energy is low, we know that you will be there for us and that we can continue. We pray that others who are tired would come to you for strength, for courage, for grace, for peace. In Jesus’ Name Amen!

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**The Cure for News Fatigue**

Sunday, February 7, 2021 Isaiah 40:21-31

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Feeling a little burned out on bad news? You are not alone. The year 2020 seemed to be a month-to-month challenge to top bad news with worse news: the coronavirus pandemic, a contentious election cycle, protests and unrest over social issues, and a host of other potential crises, an invasion of murder hornets, and the government’s revelation of UFO photos. No wonder we are all feeling a kind of information hangover! With most of us home due to spatial distancing, we naturally watched more news than normal.

Many of us are old enough to remember when news outlets consisted of three TV channels, a daily newspaper, and the radio. When Walter Cronkite told us, “That’s the way it is” at the end of the evening news broadcast, we had time to digest the day’s events. The 24-hour, multi-platform, social media-curated, constant cycle of news that confronts us today, however, allows us no time to process and seems to pile on with information that is not only continuous, but controversial.

Today’s news includes a lot of conflicting information which leaves us confused and anxious, often with no way to respond other than to offer an opinion on social media. Neil Postman, in his 1985 book Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business, called this the “loop of impotence.” Postman writes: “The news elicits from you a variety of opinions about which you can do nothing except to offer them as more news, about which you can do nothing.” Writing before the age of the internet, Postman recognized “news fatigue,” as a general malaise that leaves us feeling depressed, powerless, and distrustful of news sources that often seem superficial, sensationalist, inaccurate, or hopelessly biased. Unfortunately, the more news we consume the more anxiety we feel or, on the flip side, the more desensitized we become to the news itself.

One solution to that anxiety is to simply turn off the news, but that is increasingly difficult in a world where we are bombarded with news every time we go into public spaces. Another solution might be to only focus on the good news, as actor John Krasinski helped us to do by posting his “Some Good News” videos during the pandemic. But neither ignorance nor selectivity is the answer in a world anxious for the kind of news that people can act upon.