Let me know if you’ve ever had the same day that I’ve relived like Groundhog Day many times before: You wake up and today’s the day, today is the day you said you’d stop that bad habit. Maybe it’s about eating healthier or exercising, maybe its another more specified habit – biting nails or chewing pencils or whatnot. But today’s that day and you start off strong – you have that oatmeal for breakfast or go for that walk. But the day somehow gets away from you. Work was fire after fire to put out, your house is a wreck, a family member needs a lot of attention for some reason, there isn’t time to hear yourself think let alone just be by yourself for a second, and by the time the evening rolls around, it’s easy to justify breaking your goal, justifying that your exhaustion entitles you to whatever your bad habit is. You deserve this for what you have to put up with. And hey, once you’ve broken it, you might as well really live into it. Maybe you’ll try again tomorrow, or pick the beginning of next week or month and the vicious cycle continues.

I was weary of using this kind of example because I didn’t want to make it sound like eating the cupcake or picking at your cuticles is a sin – it’s not, eat the cupcake! But the point is that exhaustion is a slippery slope. When exhaustion overtakes us, it’s a lot easier to justify being rude to the cashier, or short with a loved one, or just not having time to grow in relationship with God. Who’s got time for that?
In today’s short text, we see Jesus after a very busy time in his life. Our Gospel writer Mark gets right to the meat of the story - John baptized Jesus, Jesus then spent forty days wandering the wilderness being tempted by the adversary, he’s preaching while his cousin gets arrested, he’s traveling and preaching and gaining disciples, he’s healing and exercising demons, he’s headed back off his journey to go help Simon’s ill mother-in-law, he’s headed BACK out to preach and heal making up for lost time, his popularity had grown so much that crowds were forming for his healing, he’s staying up till all hours of the night to help others - and then today’s text comes in. Jesus, wakes up while everyone is still sleeping, wanders off by himself to a place of isolation, and prays.

I know sometimes we can get frustrated by the details that scripture leaves out, but we can also gain curiosity in what the writers decide to put in. Why, amongst all the ministry, and preaching, and healing - all with little detail (they’re like single sentences for huge events), why bother to note that Jesus was praying by himself early one morning. I didn’t make a Facebook post about my pre-worship prayers this morning - who cares? The guy had to have been praying all the time in his line of work - why bother mention this time? Something about it must have been out of the ordinary.

Exhaustion. Exhaustion wreaks havoc on one’s mind, body, and soul. God doesn’t give the gift of Sabbath for fun - it’s serious business. Though we’ve all experienced exhaustion many times in our lives, if you’re anything like me you’ve been responding to “Hey, how are you?” with “exhausted” a lot more
often lately. I’m exhausted. We’re exhausted. Jesus was exhausted. We’re really seeing his fully human part in this moment, amongst all the fully divine healings and teachings, he does something very human. He steps away for a second, tries to catch his breath, tries to hear his own thoughts even if just for a moment, and he prays. We know that Jesus is without sin, but it doesn’t mean he is without the desire to sin and we see him, going to God for help to keep himself from sinning.

This morning, as we continue this “Called to More” series about wrestling with sin – we’re looking at the choice exhaustion gives us: two fall back into a bad habits or sinful ways because we’re exhausted, or to turn to God to persevere through to a life we never imagined we could have.

When things get overwhelming or stressful, its easy to slip back to living in ways that we know isn’t good for us. It’s easy for us to just shrug and say, “this is all I got” even when we know its not the full life God calls us into. Our sinful habits can even be coping mechanisms for the endless cycle that is: life is hard so I do the bad habit even though I know it’ll make life harder, then life’s harder so I keep doing the bad habit and so on. The very things we try to patch up our wounds with can create more wounds. The first part of this is naming the bad habits we lean on when life gets tough and singling out the behaviors that we fall into when we are tired and just done. I really want you to think about what the comfort zone habit is.

I find a lot of reassurance in seeing Jesus be exhausted, in seeing Jesus need some me-time in order to keep moving forward. I find comfort in his turning to prayer, turning to
God’s help to keep him from temptation. And I can’t help but think about what very human emotions, besides exhaustion, he was trying to fight off. Maybe the crowds and the fame was getting to him, and he needs prayer to remind him of the ministry, not the attention. Who knows but God? That’s a very real, human thing to experience.

Last Summer when we were doing our series on Joy, I preached about Christian perfection. And in the text I used, Paul writes to the people of Philippi:

It’s not that I have already reached this goal or have already been perfected, but I pursue it, so that I may grab hold of it because Christ grabbed hold of me for just this purpose. Brothers and sisters, I myself don’t think I’ve reached it, but I do this one thing: I forget about the things behind me and reach out for the things ahead of me. The goal I pursue is the prize of God’s upward call in Christ Jesus. So all of us who are spiritually mature should think this way, and if anyone thinks differently, God will reveal it to him or her. Only let’s live in a way that is consistent with whatever level we have reached.

Back when I preached on this text, I talked about Christian Perfection actually being about being made perfect in love and how it’s less about achieving the goal and more about pursuing it – trying to be closer to a pure heart like Christ each day, and not letting the days when we fail stop us.

In relation to today’s thought, this text encourages us to not allow the sins in our lives, both past and present, to keep us from pursuing that perfection in love. Instead of just
succumbing to it, we can actively fight against it and say, “this is really hard, and I need God to do it, but I won’t give in. I refuse.” Our conversion, our moments of grace and peace and of Spirit don’t cure us of sin. It’s still there once the moments gone. The stress and exhaustion of his work was there for Jesus that very day, but through pray, through centering, through acknowledging our need for God’s help, we can move forward instead of backward.

And I think it would be smart of us to also recognize the other significant thing Jesus does here. The text says:

Simon and those with him tracked him down. 37 When they found him, they told him, “Everyone’s looking for you!” He replied, “Let’s head in the other direction, to the nearby villages, so that I can preach there too. That’s why I’ve come.” He traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and throwing out demons.

The disciples have an agenda, and Jesus threw them off by wandering away. Now they want Jesus to go back to where he was brought to the brink of exhaustion back in Capernaum, but Jesus insists otherwise. He’s setting a boundary and is saying that they need to keep moving forward. Boundaries are essential for us moving beyond our bad habits and sins. They’re the only way we can create new habits.

As we find ourselves in the second half of this lent season, inching towards a celebration of the resurrection from sin and death, may we really hold closely that idea – of being resurrected from our sins, of not allowing them to make us someone God isn’t calling us to be and who we don’t want to
really be. Let us live each day remembering that that resurrection can live within us.