Have you ever gone through a period of being endlessly drained of energy? My mother, JoAnn, went through a long, awful experience with that. She had surgery to repair a serious problem that had arisen from a previous surgery she had had a number of years ago involving that surgical mesh that is the subject of class action lawsuits you hear so many TV commercial attorneys trying to enlist people for. “If you or a loved one have experienced complications…call….” That one. At any rate, after putting off the surgery for a long time, the doctors finally convinced her that there were no other options. Well, my mom is in her 80s, and the reality is that healing doesn’t come as quickly as it might have earlier in her life. Her incision simply wouldn’t heal. So for five long, long months, she spent most of her time in bed, with an 11-inch incision in her abdomen and a wound vac attached to it. After several weeks, she could get up and move to the living room where she could see the TV, but was only allowed to be up for about 30 minutes a day. She was in the front bedroom of their house, where all she had to occupy her were her books, since there’s no TV in there. Her strength was down to zero. The most routine of daily routines were inaccessible to her. She couldn’t get into the bathtub, couldn’t shower...couldn’t go teach her Sunday School class, couldn’t get out to Applebee’s, and worst of all for a Southern lady, she couldn’t get to her weekly hairdresser’s appointment.

The waiting was long and frustrating. I think it seemed to her that she would never be back on her feet again. She was in pain, was physically exhausted, was bored, was discouraged, was questioning whether she should have ever had the surgery, wondering whether this might be the end of her. On the phone, her voice sounded weaker than I had ever heard it. Time after time she made the painful and wearying trek to the wound doctor’s office, only to be given the discouraging news that the healing hadn’t progressed enough to allow them to close up the incision. But finally came the good news that they could remove the wound vac, and that she could begin to return to some of her normal routines. I knew when I called and she told me she had just gotten back from the beauty salon that things were getting better. Praise God! You could hear renewed strength in her voice, renewed hope. And most important, her focus began to turn outward again, away from that sickroom.

We all go through those weary periods at some point...those times of exhaustion, weariness, frustration. I’m always put in mind of an elderly African-American woman I visited in her hospital room who said, “Chaplain, I am sick and tired of being sick and tired.” That’s actually a quote from a Fannie Lou Hamer, one of the great voices of the Civil Rights movement, who knew something about the weary frustration of waiting for deliverance, in her case from the bone-grinding, discouraging reality of racial injustice. Sometimes the waiting just seems so long. And in our waiting, in our pain, in our weariness, we begin to turn inward. It’s easy at that point to begin to focus only on ourselves, easy for everything that is wrong to begin to loom larger and larger.

We begin to think that deliverance will never come, that healing will never arrive, that the future doesn’t hold much. And sometimes, we begin to doubt God’s power to change and transform our situation.

That’s the situation facing the people of Judah in the passage we heard from Isaiah today. When these words were written to them, they had endured 50 long years of exile in Babylon. Their homeland had been laid waste, Jerusalem and the Temple lay in unrebuilt ruins. Their king had been deposed and carried off into captivity in Babylon along with the best and the brightest and the strongest of the population. The weakest and lowliest had been left to fend for themselves in a vassal state, paying crushing taxes to the mighty empire. Their economy was ruined. The people who had known how to get things done were all gone. And those who had been taken off into captivity were in limbo, as well. Their wealth was gone. They were in a strange land, forced to speak a strange tongue. Their children were forgetting the old ways, and only the oldest among them even remembered what it had been like back home, before captivity. With the Temple destroyed, their worship center where the rituals and sacrifices had taken place, they had no clue how they were even to worship God.

“How are we to sing the songs of Zion in a strange land?” they lamented. They began to give up on God.

Then, in the middle of their weary despair, a new prophet Isaiah steps forward with a word from God. “Have you not known? Have you not heard?” “Hey, listen up!” he says, in other words, “Snap out of it!” And he captures their feelings perfectly when he talks about God as this mighty cosmic ruler, and people as
grasped a new vision of what God has in store for us.  Christ reaches out his hand to us if we will trust God's providing and God's future, this all-powerful God is ready to restore and renew, to give us fresh power, renewed purpose.  Christ reaches out his hand to us today, offering to lift us up to health and renewal, so that we can get up and serve one another and our neighbor with renewed vigor, so that we can welcome the outcast and the stranger, the sick and the lonely and the weary and the hungry who are at our doorstep, bearing us up on eagle’s wings so that all can know that same power. Renewed strength is God’s promise to us.  Will you pray with me for that power?  [Pray.]