

Proper 11B 2021 Sermon

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Jesus' disciples have just returned from the mission on which Jesus had sent them. And after that period of intense activity, Jesus says to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." And Mark adds, "For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat."

"Coming and going, with no leisure even to eat" could be said about the lives of many of us modern day Americans. Holding down full-time jobs, multi-tasking to the max, raising a family with all *that* entails these days (sports, dance or music lessons, etc.) – who has leisure to eat? Grab a donut and head out the door in the morning, pick up a meal at the drive-in window and eat it in the car, or order pizza to be delivered (since there's no time to cook).

Even retirement, as many of you know, can be full of busy-ness and stress. Grandparents find themselves busy with grandkids, or with volunteering or participating in this group or that organization. As we get older, we may find ourselves busy going to this doctor or that specialist, this therapy or that treatment.

If not busy-ness of body, then there is busy-ness of *mind*. Our minds are constantly full of thoughts "coming and going" in our heads. Thinking about what happened yesterday, or what we *should* be doing today or *will* be doing tomorrow. Our minds can be "coming and going" with worry about our health, or the health of a loved one; stress about our finances, whether we will have enough. Or our minds can be "coming and going" with the news of the day, with social media, or with whatever partisan controversies stir us up and make us angry, keeping our bodies pumped with the adrenaline of partisan outrage, which we can easily mistake for being "alive."

But while all this “coming and going” may seem energizing at first, in the long run, it is exhausting. The adrenaline burns up and we’re left deflated, spent, worn out. And so we seek rest, escape, whether in the form of a nap or a vacation, a cup of tea or glass of wine, reading a book or streaming a movie on Netflix.

“Come away to a deserted place... and **rest** a while,” Jesus tells his disciples.

But when they *get* to that deserted place, there is a large crowd. Now, if it were you or I instead of Jesus, we might tell the crowd, “Look, we’re on vacation. We need rest. Go home.” But instead, we are told that Jesus “had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.” Jesus and the disciples end up getting **no** rest at all.

Or *do* they?

Our Gospel tells us that when Jesus saw the crowd, “he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to *teach* them many things.” And in that teaching, their hearts and souls are nourished. Might it be possible that, by entering into God’s compassion and allowing the Spirit and Love of God to flow through him into this crowd of people, Jesus actually experiences “rest” in the process?

This is what John Shea suggests when he writes, “[R]est should not be taken in a conventional sense. It does not mean more time to sleep and play and less time to work. Rest [as Jesus uses the word] is **Sabbath** rest, learning how to be sustained by the goodness of Creation, a Creation rooted in God. Rest does not mean inactivity but acting in consort with Creation, with the Spirit of the Creator who is already acting. The overall project is to learn how to receive divine energy and nourishment...”¹ To learn how to receive divine energy and nourishment. And, my friends, **as** we compassionately allow God’s love and grace to flow out from us into others, do we not receive divine energy and nourishment, replenishment, in return?

Our Prayer Book quotes Jesus as saying, “Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will **refresh** you.” (p. 332; Matt. 11:28-30)) This is **Sabbath** rest: a rest not of inactivity, but of *refreshment*, restoring and reviving strength. In opening himself up to have compassion for that crowd of people, Jesus was opening the wide channel of his heart to the eternal Word and Spirit and Love of God pouring through him into that crowd of people; and as this divine Grace poured through his wide-open heart, **he** was *refreshed* by it, also. He *participated* in Sabbath rest: that kind of rest which God engaged in on the 7th Day of Creation; that kind of rest that is embedded into the very DNA of this world God has made. To participate in Sabbath rest is to return to God’s original purposes for humankind and for all of Creation.

The British poet David Whyte relates a conversation he once had that revealed to him the meaning of Sabbath rest. He writes, “There was a time, many years ago, working at a nonprofit organization, trying to fix the world and finding the world didn’t want to be fixed as quickly as I’d like, that I found myself exhausted, stressed and finally, after one particularly hard day, at the end of my tether... I was to have a very special guest that evening: an Austrian friend, a Benedictine monk, Brother David Steindl-Rast, the nearest thing I had to a really wise person in my life at that time or at any time since... I had my day on my mind, and the mind-numbing tiredness I was experiencing at work. I said suddenly, out of nowhere, almost beseechingly, ‘Brother David, speak to me of exhaustion. Tell me about exhaustion.’”

“And then he said a life-changing thing. ‘You know,’ he said, ‘the antidote to exhaustion is not necessarily rest.’”

“What is it then?”

“‘The antidote to exhaustion is wholeheartedness.’”² Wholeheartedness.

I’ve thought about that this past week: “The antidote to exhaustion is wholeheartedness.” And I discovered – to my surprise! – that it is **true**; at least for me. This past week, whenever I found myself feeling tired or mentally or emotionally drained, I stopped and asked myself whether I was being wholehearted in what I was doing. And I found, every time, that I wasn’t. Instead, I was being half-hearted: doing what I was doing with my mind somewhere else, my energies not all invested in what I was doing. Impatiently waiting to get whatever I was doing *over with*, so I could get on to something which I imagined would be less burdensome or onerous or tedious. But if I could simply put my whole heart into what I was doing, instead of doing it half-heartedly, I consistently found that what I was doing became less arduous, and had more meaning and purpose for me. And my energies were refreshed.

“Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy-laden, and I will *refresh* you,” Jesus teaches us. “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” His yoke is easy and his burden light because he never does anything half-heartedly. He does everything **whole**-heartedly, with his heart wide open to God’s love and Spirit pouring through him into other people, and he is continually refreshed by entering into that life-giving flow.

My friends, I think that, so often, when we feel drained or exhausted in what we’re doing, perhaps feeling defeated or burned out, we give up. Or perhaps we leave it for tomorrow. But Brother David suggests another response to exhaustion: “[A]ll you need to do,” he says, “is do the same thing that you are doing now but wholeheartedly. And this wholeheartedness is [filled] with all that energy that comes up from that deep well within us. The heart is, so to say, the taproot of all our being, where intellect and will and emotions and body and

mind... is all one. **That** is what we call the heart. Put all of that into what you're doing. I think that is a good recipe against burnout."³

Ordinary moments can become holy when we show up with wholeheartedness. I think we all wish that our lives were less scattered and tired. And so, perhaps, this coming week, when we **do** feel scattered and tired, we might take it as a cue, a prompt, to do whatever it is we are doing wholeheartedly.

AMEN

1 John Shea, *Eating with the Bridegroom*, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 2005, p. 184

2 https://www.oprah.com/oprahs-lifeclass/poet-david-whytes-questions-that-have-no-right-to-go-away_1/2

3 <https://embodimentmatters.com/about/#erinhere>