

“Rest for the Weary”

July 22, 2018

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Mark 6:30-34

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. 31 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. 32 And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.

33 Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them.

34 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.

NO REST

Have you ever been so busy that you didn't even have time to eat?

I'm not sure I've ever been that busy!

But, Jesus and his disciples were that busy.

Our lesson for today tells us that so many people were coming and going that they didn't even have time to eat.

That's busy.

It wears me out just listening to this story!

I much prefer what Jesus says in Matthew's gospel,

“Come to me, all you that are weary

and are carrying heavy burdens,

and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

That's what I need.

Rest for the weary.

I don't need to be so busy that I don't even have time to eat!

But, in Mark's gospel there is very little rest for weary disciples. They are trying to follow a Messiah who moves at breakneck speed.

In our Scripture lesson the disciples have just finished giving Jesus a report on their own mission trip. (6:30)

You'll remember that Jesus sent them out two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.

The mission was successful.
They preached,
"Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand."
And they healed many.

I suspect they were exhausted from their work.
But, here they are again.
So busy working with Jesus that they don't even have time to eat.

It's hard to keep up with Jesus.
the Messiah is always on the move
...always going to the next town to preach and heal.

Jesus once warned someone
who wanted to be his disciple,

"Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20)

That's the cost of discipleship.
The disciples' time of rest is always being interrupted by the needs of the crowd.

It was this way from the very beginning.

EVERYONE IS LOOKING FOR YOU

In the first chapter of Mark's gospel,
we read about an exhausting day of preaching and healing.

It lasts well into the night,

Jesus gets up early, while it's still dark,
and retreats to a "lonely place" to pray.

But, even at that early morning hour,
Peter and his companions track Jesus down.

Peter says,
"Jesus, what are you doing way out here?
Everyone is looking for you!" (Mark 1:35-37)

I think I would have let Peter have a piece of my mind. "Can't I just have a few minutes alone before starting again?"

It's crazy to work so hard.
The needs of the crowd are truly overwhelming.

But, Jesus doesn't reject the needs of the crowd.
He just moves on to another village
so others can be healed and hear the good news of God's forgiveness.

And wherever Jesus goes,
the need is overwhelming.

WORKAHOLIC

In the third chapter of Mark,
we read about another situation where the crowds are so large and the needs are so great
that Jesus and his disciples don't even have time or space to eat.

When his family heard about this they came
to "take charge" of him.
He was obviously "out of his mind". (Mark 3:20-21)

He couldn't keep up this pace.
It would kill him.

If I were counseling someone who was so busy that they didn't even have time to eat,
I would tell them the same thing.

"You're out of your mind."

Friends might even try to take charge of them,
to have them committed for their own good.

After all, if you work day and night without any rest or food,
you are going to have a heart attack.

It's crazy.

But, Jesus rejected the advice of his family.
He didn't go home with them.
He didn't let them take charge of him.

Instead, he said that those who had left their homes to follow him, the disciples, were the ones who were his real family. (Mark 3:33-34)

COME AWAY TO A DESERTED PLACE

But, in today's lesson we learn that Jesus did care about his disciples' need for rest.

Once again things got so crowded and hectic
that they didn't even have time to eat.

So Jesus said,
"Come away to a deserted place
all by yourselves and rest a while."

I like the sound of that.
That sounds like a lot like the Jesus who speaks in Matthew's gospel.

"Come to me, all you that are weary
and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

Finally, the disciples are going to get some rest.
Right?

Not so fast.
Remember.
This is Mark's gospel.

Mark's favorite word is "immediately".
And that's how the action proceeds.

Mark's gospel continues to proceed at a breathtaking pace.
And the disciples are caught up in a vortex of activity...

...even in the "deserted place".

The Scripture tells us that the disciples
"went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves."

But, guess who followed them?
You guessed it.
The needy crowd.

They took note of where the disciples were going,
and people from all the towns along the lake hurried on foot to the other
side.

So, when Jesus and his disciples landed on the other side, in that "de-
serted place"...

Well, it wasn't so deserted any more.
If anything, the crowds were even larger.

SEND THEM AWAY

How disheartening this must have been to these exhausted disciples.

Have you ever had your vacation interrupted by a call from work?
Even if the matter is rather small,
I'll bet you said (at least to yourself),

“Will these people ever leave me alone?
Can’t I have just a little time to myself?”

I think the disciples must have thought that.

A bit later in this chapter, after Jesus preaches
and heals many in this deserted place,
the disciples come to Jesus and say,

“Jesus, this place is really off the beaten path.
I’m sure these people are really hungry.

Better send them away
so they’ll have time to go to the surrounding villages
and find some food.” (Mark 6:36)

The disciples had a point.
The people did need food.
And the location was remote.

It would be prudent to send the crowd away before it gets dark.

But, I wonder if the disciples had other motives.
They were weary and needed rest.
They needed some time to eat a meal.

Jesus had promised the disciples a time of rest in a place that was de-
serted.
But, Jesus’ compassion for the crowd had crowded out his promise to his
disciples.

Jesus might be able to live on love and compassion,
but that wasn’t cutting it for the disciples.

They were hungry and tired.

They needed rest away from the crush of the crowd.
They needed that vacation Jesus had promised.
So, they asked Jesus to “send them away”.

We'll talk about what happened next in next week's sermon. You don't want to miss it!
But, you'll have to wait for next week.

COMPASSION FATIGUE

Today's lesson presents an important problem that we all face.

How do we balance the need for a time of rest over against the needs of others?

How can we establish boundaries without sending people away in their hour of need?

Jesus had compassion for the crowds.
He could see that they were like sheep without a shepherd.

But, I'm not Jesus.
Sometimes I'm overwhelmed by it all.
I experience "compassion fatigue".

Have you ever experienced compassion fatigue?
I bet you have.

We watch the news.
We look at all the bad things that are going on in our world. And sometimes we just want to throw up our hands and say,

"I quit. The troubles of the world are just too much for me to consider."

We become numb to the needs of the crowd
and with the disciples we just say,

"Send them away.
They're going to have to find their own food.
I need to eat supper in peace and quiet."

CAREGIVERS VERSUS THE CUREGIVER

When I was in seminary,

I took a pastoral care course.
We learned how to listen and care for those in need.
We took it very seriously.

And rightly so.

Pastoral care is serious business.
But, then our teachers drove home an important point again and again.

Remember, you're not Jesus.
You're not the Messiah.
You're not the Savior.

Don't act like you are.

I've noticed that our Stephen Ministers learn something very similar.

They say that they are the caregiver, but only God is the Curegiver.

"Christians are responsible for care;
God is responsible for cure."

In other words, we can't take the cares of the world upon ourselves. We don't have the power to offer the world a cure.

And if we try to do that,
it'll wear us down.
Big time.

I've seen it happen.
I've seen ministers take up heavy burdens
that weren't their own,
and they burned out.

They couldn't take it any more.

I've seen the same thing happen to church members.

They wanted to be faithful disciples.
They were serious about following Jesus.

They made sacrifices to serve in the church.

But, then they noticed that others are not making the same sacrifice.

Just a few are doing the lion's share of the work.

"Not fair!" they say.

"Those other people should be just as dedicated as me."

And service in the church becomes a burden instead of an expression of thanksgiving.

This also leads to burnout and often that burned out person often becomes estranged from the church.

All of us need to remember this.

We're not Jesus.

We're not the Messiah.

We're not the Savior.

We're not the Curegiver.

We need to quit taking a role that is above our pay grade!

Jesus has a heart big enough to have compassion on the pressing crowd.
We don't.

We don't have that kind of power.

We don't have that kind of emotional strength.

So what's a weary disciple to do?

How can we be compassionate without suffering compassion fatigue?
How can we be compassionate without thinking that we have all the answers?

TRUSTING IN GOD'S AMAZING GRACE

We bring people to Jesus and leave them in his capable hands.

We trust in the power of God's amazing grace.

We trust in the fact that God is the Caregiver.

I have found it's helpful to some time each day thinking about God's amazing grace.

Philip Yancey wrote a book entitled,
"What's so amazing about God's grace?"

I believe that's a question we should ask each day.
What's so amazing about God's grace?

Who is this God that I seek to serve?
What does the Bible teach us about God?

And how might that knowledge change the way I live my life?

In particular, it's important for us to ask,
"What does the Bible teach us about God in the life of Christ?"

In Christ we have the clearest, down to earth example of grace

In today's lesson Jesus teaches us that God is like a Good Shepherd.

God has compassion on those who are weak and weary. God has compassion on those who have a hunger that even the Blue Plate Special can't satisfy.

Jesus had compassion on the "hungry" crowd who followed him to the other side of the lake.

Jesus had compassion on the disciples who needed to find a quiet place to rest.

And God in Christ has compassion on us.

Are you weary?
Are you sick and tired of being sick and tired?
Has it all become too much for you?

Think about this.

God is a compassionate God.

God understands our struggles.
God understands our deep seated hungers.

And God in Christ invites disciples to come away to a quiet place and rest.
God in Christ invites us to sit at the table that he has prepared.

Now this doesn't mean that we are always going on retreat.

Like those disciples many of our days will be filled with frenetic activity.

We will often be "as busy as a bee".

We will seek to get away from it all on the "other side" only to find that there is a hungry crowd waiting for us!

OUR HUNGRY CROWD

I'm not sure what "hungry crowd" is waiting for you.

It may be students that you need to teach.
It may be clients that you must please.
It may be a needy family member
who requires more than you can give.

And so forth.
It's different for each of us.

But, rest assured that hungry crowd still waits the other side.

How can we disciples show compassion
when on some days we don't even have time to eat?

We can do what we can to care for those needy souls. We can care for them because God cares for them.

CAST YOUR ANXIETY ON THE LORD

But, we must also remember that there are limits.
We don't have the cure for what ails them.
In fact, we're a part of that hungry crowd

Just like the crowd, we too need to hear what Jesus has to say.

He can teach us many things.

But, we must take time to listen.

We must trust our future to the compassionate Lord
...so that we can hear his Word and receive rest for our souls in the present.

Christ is our peace.

We can rely on Him and his Body, the church for strength and comfort.

We are not sheep without a shepherd.

We have each other and we have our Savior.

The Bible tells us that we should cast all anxiety on Jesus because he cares for us. (See 1Peter 5:7)

In other words, we find rest not in a lack of activity but in a lack of anxiety about the future.

We cast all our burdens on the Lord.

Jesus once said that each day gives us enough to worry about.

There's no need to worry about tomorrow.

Tomorrow will take care of itself. (Matthew 6:34)

So, get some rest

And then get up tomorrow

and know that God is already there.

And when the hungry crowd presses in remember this,

God will provide...

for them

and for us.

Amen.