

Jesus Rested. Do you?

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Slide: Sunset pic

Rest. When you think about that word, rest, what comes to your mind?

- Doing nothing?
- Inactivity after work?
- Relief from anything that wearies or troubles?
- A period of solitude or tranquility?
- Sleep?

Consider this word “Rest” and what you think it is. And, if I gave you free permission to renew, stop or slow down and simply be, would you do it? Would you feel guilty to take those minutes of rest? Would you take the time to do that or would the instinct to look at your phone, email, or TV, or that last task of mowing the lawn or something hook you in to being busy again? My worst tendency is to think that after I have accomplished everything on my plate for the day, then I can rest. Well...sometimes that can mean never.

What if I told you that Jesus himself gives you permission to rest and that actually, he needed it himself? Would you see that

invitation as important, easy, or difficult?

When the pandemic first began, I observed two phenomenon that occurred to people. The first was the phenomenon of inaction. There were many people who could not do anything: people in nursing homes or people shut in. There were those who lost positions and could not find work. They were alone a lot, had less to do, ran out of projects, and had a great deal of solitude, which was frustrating, difficult and isolating. The second phenomenon was the opposite, that of overwhelm with doing.

These were people who had to figure out how their jobs had to fit a new dynamic, people who needed to teach their children while also being teachers at school, medical personnel, public officials, and in churches, it was a constant day to day catching up of how are we going to function and make new things happen. The two extremes existed simultaneously and both had and continue to be difficult ways of being during an unprecedented time that has changed everything.

But, here is what I think. Neither of those two ways of being was restful. Let’s remind ourselves again of this brief little scripture

verse we heard today in the Gospel reading:

“And Jesus said to them, ‘Come away to a deserted place and rest awhile.’”

In this day and age, I can't help but wonder if this simple invitation of Jesus isn't packed with so many associations. For, I have filled my life with activity, work, obligations – which the concept of rest is something that I have to look at as intentional in order to do it. I don't mean sleep when I say this, although restful sleep is also desired for everyone. But, I mean rest – the act of resting – of simply being, taking time to consider resting in where you are at the time and not considering the next thing. It's also not filling the void of resting when we notice we stop for a moment. Do we actually rest or take time to stop? Or, do we think we do but really don't?

I think in this pandemic, we have forgotten how to rest. We often mistake idleness for rest. We also tend to think that we are taking a break when we watch TV or scroll on Facebook. Neither of those things are rest. And yet, here Jesus invites us – NO – gives us permission to rest. Did you know that we are given permission to do this? For, it's unlikely neither that Jesus, nor his

disciples could have ever had the compassion they had for the crowd around them if they had not also rested. The simple act of being enabled them to be better at serving when the pressure came and the crowds pushed in. Jesus knew it as he saw this happen to his disciples. And, as the human One, not only divine, but human, he came to understand the power of rest. How could he be a shepherd to the ones around him if he didn't understand?

This week, I went to visit one of our wonderful St. John's members at Oak Gardens Assisted Living. They had not yet gotten back to having worship services there, so when I came in, I saw that people were just about to watch a church service. I happened in at just the right time, for when I mentioned that since I happened to be there, I would be happy to provide a worship service if they rather would have something in person. I was there to share scripture and prayers with one of our members anyway, why not include others?

The Activity Director was so happy to have this kind of normalcy again, she joyfully gathered everyone and we worshiped. Before the worship service, she pulled me aside and asked, “Could you pray for the caregivers who work here? We are so short staffed and we all love our

people. But, we are so overwhelmed and don't have time to rest. I love these people but I'm so burned out. I really could use prayer right now." Rest, it seems, is in short supply for many people. And, yet, Jesus is teaching us here in the Gospel reading that it is necessary to avoid being overwhelmed.

I'm sure that all of us are familiar with the commandment to keep the Sabbath Day. It's one of the Ten Commandments after all, and is the only Commandment that demands we rest. Rest is not only given to us, it's required according to this commandment given so long ago to the Israelite slaves who languished in Egypt. They probably didn't think of it as something that was arduous or interfered with their time. As slaves, they probably thought, "You mean we get to rest and we even have to? God be praised!"

But, before we think that we are not like those slaves in Egypt, let's reconsider this: We aren't all that different, except our slavery is self-imposed and therefore, a lot harder to overcome. We have enslaved ourselves to the idea of success. We are enslaved to the ideas of our children having every opportunity, which is often why they live such frenetic lives going from thing to thing all the time. We are enslaved to

the idea that the only thing that will bring contentment is more: more money, more stuff on the resume. And, we are obsessed with the idea that we will be considered lazy if we are not constantly doing. I'm sure like me you are already naming those things in your head that has stopped you from times of just being quiet each day.

Now, of course, this reading from Mark also shows us the contrast between the need for rest over and against the need to drop everything and have compassion for the crowd that pressed upon Jesus. I think this week's Gospel reading is also about the ongoing and necessary tension between compassion and self-protection. The need to take breaks is essential, but so is recognizing when rest needs to be sidelined for a temporary time. Guess what? Jesus lived with this tension, too.

On the one hand, Jesus didn't apologize about his need for rest and solitude. He saw no shame in retreating when he and his disciples needed a break from the tiring work of ministry.

On the other hand, Jesus also would not allow his weariness to overwhelm him. There is a strange but necessary tension between rest and work. The world still is in

constant and dire need because it is the world. And yet, the world can't use us if we become overwhelmed and useless in our resolve to work towards showing the light of Jesus in a hurting world.

Therefore, hear the words that Jesus says again. These words are an invitation to rest:

“Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile.”

This isn't just an invitation to take the afternoon off or take a few days of vacation. This is an invitation to remove the shackles of our slavery of doing – always doing and making our doing the actual God in our lives instead of the true God, Jesus Christ, who teaches us that the Sabbath is important enough to pay attention to and that it leads to spending time resting in God.

Even stopping for ten minutes a day to simply be with God and resting in the Holy Spirit, to stop, look up and see the trees and the birds; to eat a meal and enjoy the moment of taste; to relish in the creation around you so that you may be renewed. God builds rest into us and it is a gift given to us, so that once we have taken rest and refreshment, we can be the compassionate people God calls us to be. Amen.