

SERMON: Rest Awhile
TEXT: Mark 6:30-34

7-18-21

Have you ever been so busy that you didn't have time to eat a meal? I imagine all of us have done this at least once in our lives. Let's say you're a working parent who has only a small window of time between getting off work and getting your child to their music lesson on time. Fast food is usually your best option, but there are too many cars ahead of you in the McDonald's drive through lane. No time to eat. Or you're fast approaching the deadline for a project at work or school. No time for lunch. Maybe you slept through your alarm and you're late for work; there's no time to throw a bagel in the toaster.

But this is the modern world. We are always moving at a fast pace, and we take it for granted that this is going to happen now and then. Fortunately, nearly every convenience store and most restaurants have drive-thru service for these occasions. And if nothing else, maybe there's a vending machine closeby.

One of the women at another church I served was always in a hurry. Always had something to do, someplace to go, someone to meet with. If she called you on the phone, she would barely say hello before she started in on what she wanted to tell you. A couple of her friends at the church tell a story about how they had to

lock her in the church library to get her to sit down and have a sandwich with them
- on her birthday!

But it's sort of surprising to hear that Jesus and his disciples have encountered the same problem. "For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat." On the other hand, Jesus does have a great deal of ministry to do in just three years.

At the beginning of chapter 6, Mark writes about "the mission of the twelve," in which Jesus "sent them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts... So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them." (Mark 6:7-8, 12-13)

Indeed, the disciples have been working hard. Up to this point, they have simply been watching how Jesus works and listening to his teaching. When he sends them out, they are on their own, with just one equally inexperienced partner to work with in proclaiming repentance, casting out demons, and anointing and healing the sick. Talk about stress!

Now, in today's passage, they are back together. "The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught." Then Jesus invited them - or more accurately, instructed 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. Ahhh, a boat. That sounds nice, doesn't it? Or, choose your own happy place: in your favorite chair reading a book; sitting on a beach feeling the ocean breeze on your face and listening to waves crash on the shore; playing the piano or just listening to music; walking your dog; holding a sleeping baby. Wherever it is for you, Jesus invites you, "Come away... and REST AWHILE."

I recently had my back patio screened in, and I am enjoying it even more than I imagined I would. I call it my outdoor sanctuary. I especially appreciate being there in the morning. I sit in my rocking chair and sip a cup of coffee, taking in the natural sights and sounds of the still-quiet world. I never realized how many different song birds were in my neighborhood. I look out at my back yard where I have a developing garden of wildflowers, and at my hummingbird feeder, awaiting a tiny, silent guest looking for something sweet. One day I sat out there during a

thunderstorm and a very heavy downpour of rain. And the best part, of course, is that the bugs aren't bugging me!

Also while I'm out there, I try to practice some things I've learned through yoga, meditation, centering prayer, and mindfulness. Mind you, I don't have a great deal of experience with any one of these practices, but I have learned a couple of ways to clear my mind. I have more awareness of the areas in my body that hold tension. And I have learned about how to relax both my mind and my body.

Maybe you'd like to try some of these with me. First we need to know something about deep breathing; it's not as easy as it sounds. If you've ever sung with a choir or taken voice lessons, you probably know that you kind of have to relearn how to breathe as babies do naturally, from your diaphragm. A good deep breath fills up your abdomen first and your lungs after that.

Now take a slow, deep breath. As you inhale, think of bringing in peace or love or healing. Think about filling up with these things. Now let it out slowly, and as you exhale, imagine getting rid of something that's causing you stress. Breathe out worry, fear, or pain. You could also incorporate deep breathing into the Lord's

Prayer or any prayer; using short phrases as you inhale, and the next part of the sentence as you exhale. Remember that it was God's breath - the breath of the Holy Spirit - that gave you life.

Also take a moment to notice your muscles. Are your shoulders tight? Drop them. Is your jaw clenched? Let it relax. Are your hands closed in a fist with your hand? Put your hands in your lap and let them hang open. Beginning with your toes, relax each part of your body before you move to the next, working all the way up to your head.

One contemporary theologian began her article about the passage from Mark sharing her thoughts about what's being referred to as, *The Great Resignation*. This "refers to the surge in people leaving their jobs post-pandemic... According to the U.S. Department of Labor, a record 4 million people quit their jobs during the month of April this year."

"In church circles," she explained, "our Great Resignation refers to deacons and elders resigning after a tumultuous and exhausting year of service, and pastors leaving not just their current call, but ministry altogether. This pandemic year has

not only burned them out, but disillusioned them to ministry.” (Teri McDowell Ott, *Looking Into the Lectionary*, The Presbyterian Outlook, July 18, 2021)

Let me assure you, this is not the case for me, though I certainly understand how my colleagues feel.

This phenomenon of resignation is happening not just with ministers, but with nurses and other medical professionals, teachers, police, government officials, the list goes on. We are all weary. Weary of an ongoing pandemic. Weary of arguing over masks and vaccinations. Weary of politics and government, full of so much talk and so little action. Parents are weary from having their children at home. Children are weary from struggling to learn in front of a computer. Older adults are weary from loneliness and isolation. Everyone is weary from anger.

We all need to be reminded that Jesus has compassion for us. Jesus calls us to REST AWHILE.

But let’s not forget the rest of the story. When Jesus and his disciples arrive on the other side of the lake, it is not deserted as they had hoped. “As he went

ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”

Rest. Compassion. A shepherd. We need these now more than ever.

Thomas Merton, an American monk, writer, theologian, and mystic said, “We are not at peace with others because we are not at peace with ourselves, and we are not at peace with ourselves because we are not at peace with God.”

Jesus invites us, “Come away... and REST AWHILE.” Breathe in the Holy Spirit. Know that you are held close in the comfort of God’s arms. Even this we do to the glory of God.

AMEN.