

Rest Awhile

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.

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July 21, 2024

Rev. Michael Catanzaro

Reminder, I will be on vacation the next two Sundays (and will be endeavoring to rest). As such, there will be no sermon emailed or snail mailed to folks. We will resume our normal practice of doing so on Sunday August 11th.

I.

This week I was reminded, once again, that there are no friends like old friends. Even more so as those old friends get older. I have known Tom and Janice for over 40 years. I first met Tom my freshman year in college, we pledged the same fraternity, lived next to each other in the chapter house when we were sophomores, then shared an apartment our senior year (well, *his* senior year, I took a “Dean’s Vacation” and graduated the following year).

As some of you may or may not know, I played football in college. Tom attended every home game because he was a cheerleader and Janice his partner (see photo below). Since that seemed to work out so well, some years later they married, and I had the honor of being his Best Man. For the past 40 years we have been and important part of each other’s lives. We’ve gone from Grateful Dead shows and mischief making to raising families, learning to become good husbands, pursuing careers to, now, getting old(er) together.

II.

Tom and I have always been very intentional about our relationship, as each of us treasures it greatly and the role we have played, and continue to play, in each other’s lives. We see each other three or four times a year. For the past few years, many of those visits were given over to work days as Tom was integral in building the She Shack. Along with such labors, though, we always manage to get in a fair amount of feasting, fun, and celebration. With rare exception, we usually share some time together each summer as well; first as families and, now, as couples.

So it was that Monday Tom and Janice, and Linda and I, enjoyed a lovely afternoon in, on and near the water. We barbecued some [Chiavetta’s](#) chicken on the grill, enjoyed a fine dinner and, after dishes, retired to the front porch for conversation and some of Linda’s delicious raspberry buckle for dessert. At a point, though, the rain started blowing in. We quickly covered the couch, moved inside and, in a bit of “group think” moment, all decided it was time for bed. It was 9 p.m.

III.

Not that the day was particularly strenuous. No, we're just getting to be old fuddy-duddies. We didn't even put up a fuss. Our hard charging, staying up late days well behind us, we just brushed our teeth, shut off the lights, and bid each other a pleasant night's sleep. All of which got me to thinking about today's scripture reading from Mark chapter 6 in a new light.

Here we find Jesus offering a real gem of a commandment to his followers; both then *and* now, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." As is usually the case in the Kingdom of God, the harvest is plentiful but the laborers few. Apparently the few were so busy, what with their various comings and goings, they had no leisure even to eat. So, in a nod to self-care, Jesus got everybody loaded into a boat and set sail for a deserted place where they could be by themselves and rest awhile. A wonderful plan, for sure, but a challenge to pull off; both then *and* now.

IV.

Turns out, many saw them going and, recognizing them, hurried on foot and arrived ahead of them. When Jesus and the disciples went ashore, a great crowd greeted them. Rather than offer a lesson about boundary issues, Jesus had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So, he began to teach them many things. Not to be deterred, Jesus again tried to secure some rest for himself and the disciples. This time they crossed over to the *other* shore, but when they landed the very same thing happened. Seems the whole region had rushed to see him and began to bring the sick on mats to be healed. This occurred again and again, in villages or cities or farms. People laid the sick before him and begged that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak such that all who touched it were healed. Which, I am sure, was little consolation to the disciples who were tired, spent, worn out, and sorely in need of some rest.

V.

While the disciples probably needed to catch up on their sleep as well, here in this passage Jesus was specifically advocating for *rest*. Though rest and sleep are often lumped together, my experience with Tom and Janice of going to bed at 9 p.m. caused me stop to and consider if there is a difference between the two and, if so, how to distinguish between them?

Curious, I did a word search of the instances where the word “rest” appears in the Bible, the context, and its usage. In Matthew 26:45 we find Jesus in the Garden of Gethemene returning from prayer and soul-searching prior to the series of events which would lead to his crucifixion. He comes upon the disciples and says, “Are you still sleeping and resting? The hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners.” Clearly, then, when it comes to scripture there is a distinction between sleep and rest.

VI.

One of the most significant occurrences of the word rest is found in Genesis 2:2, “And on the seventh day God finished the work that God had done, and God rested on the seventh day from all the work that God had done.” In the Hebrew scripture the word for rest is “nuach” which is defined its most basic sense as “cessation” or, more simply, “stopping.” For six days God was *doing* things (like creating the world and such). On the seventh day, however, God *stopped* doing things. While it is hard to imagine God needing sleep, it was clear that God needed, or at least had a desire to rest.

This led to the seventh day of our own week been understood as the Day of Rest, or the Sabbath. In Exodus chapter 20, we find God giving Moses the Ten Commandments, with #3 being, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” Resting, then, is a sacred act done in obedience to, and emulation of God.

VII.

Interestingly, when we correctly understand the Ten Commandments to be more than a mere a list of dos and don'ts but, instead, a ranked guide for human behavior, remembering or honoring the Day of Rest comes in as more important than honoring one's mother and father, not killing, committing adultery, stealing, bearing false witness or coveting. Meaning, for God rest is a *top* priority. Not just for the health and the well-being of the creature, but as one of the most import means by which we keep the first three and most important of the Commandments: having no other gods before the Creator, making no idols, and not taking the name of the Lord in vain. Rest is an acknowledgment that God must come first in our lives, over whatever idols we have allowed or created for ourselves. Rest is also a rejection of the hypocrisy of acknowledging God in *word*, but not honoring God in *action*.

VIII.

This begs an interesting question, however. As we ponder the notion of rest as sacred act, how much of an act (or action) is it? Remember, for six days God was *doing* something, but on the seventh day God did not start doing something *else* God *stopped* doing all together. If we are to honor God and follow Christ it would seem extremely important for us to correctly understand the concept of rest.

As we move through the various instances of rest occurring the Bible, the concept begins to be nuanced. In the Hebrew scripture rest comes to take on the meaning of settling in (to oneself), as well as being quiet or quieting oneself. In the New Testament, the Greek word “anapausis” is used to connote composure, peacefulness and well-being. Not quite actions, but not really inaction either; rest is somewhere in between.

IX.

How a word is used or defined at the front end is certainly important to understanding the concept to which it refers or points. However, another way to understand a concept is to recognize how it manifests itself at the back end. In Matthew 11:28 Jesus says, “Come to me all who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest for your souls.” Rest requires a faith and confidence that we can come to God regardless of how we’re feeling, be it distracted, numb or discouraged, and enter a space of well-being and understanding where we can be emotionally honest with ourselves.

Rest is a return to our true identity. It is saying *no* to the roles and responsibilities others try to place on us, and saying *yes* to the only role that matters: being the beloved child of God we have been created to be. Which is, was, and will forever be *enough*. Any other identity we have for ourselves, or others place up us, is an illusion. Rest is the process by which we return to the person we *really* are.

X.

After Tom and Janice left on Wednesday, I was reflecting on their visit. I had found it *particularly* restful and became curious as to why this might be. I realized that while I always enjoy my time with them for the food, fun, and frolicking, the real gift they give to me is to see me just as I am, not as who I

have become over the past 40 years or as the person my life now requires me to be. The reason there are no friends quite like old friends, is that they help us to remember who we *really* are, thereby encouraging us to see ourselves in the same way. This is particularly the case as old friends get older, and more responsibilities, roles and expectations are layered upon us.

While I certainly understand that I am very fortunate and very blessed to have friends like Tom and Janice in my life, I also realize that every single one of us has at least *one* old friend in our lives who has the ability to see us in such a way; namely, ourselves. What rest is really about, is spending time with our oldest old friend.

XI.

To many, spending time with ourselves, and *just* with ourselves, may seem like an indulgence. As people of faith, though, we must always remember that rest is a sacred act. Rest is the time and space we create in our lives in order to not only *accept* the grace the cross provides, but to *revel* in such a grace that would heal us and make us whole. Rest is the means by which we demonstrate the profundity of our faith in having the courage to simply STOP; recognizing that every once and a while doing *nothing* is the only *something* God requires us to do. Rest is an act of obedience to the one who created us, an offering of gratitude to the one who has redeemed us, and an open invitation to the one who stands ready to sustain us. Rest is a beautiful ambition, and I wish each of you all the best this day in pursuing such a goal. Amen.

That is Janice on top and Tom and the bottom. If you look to the left at the hem on Janice's skirt, you can see my foot behind them as we break the huddle and run up to the line. We've been standing behind one another and cheering each other on for over 40 years now.

