

Sunday Drive

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

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.

Sunday Drive

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

July 18, 2021

Rev. Michael Catanzaro

I.

I've been having a little bit of a freakout of late. Its nothing to get overly concerned about...I don't think; it isn't like this kind of thing hasn't happened before. I hesitate to even bring it up, but I've decided to do so based on the assumption I'm not the only one in such a boat and that some of you (or all of you) may have experienced a similar kind of freakout at some point in recent memory. Either that, or once I alert you to it, this is going to have the effect of *causing* you to freak out. For this I am truly sorry, but just because one doesn't have the good sense to *get* freaked out, it doesn't mean that the circumstances aren't such that a freakout isn't warranted. In any event, the good news is I think I found a solution to moving through it. Pretty sure, anyway. No, I'm sure I'm sure.

II.

Before I get into all of that, however, I'd like to tell you about the Sunday Drive Linda and I took last week after church. The term "Sunday Drive" goes back in our country to the 1920s and 1930s; when the world was much smaller than it is today, and many car owners did not depend on their automobiles for transportation. Taking a leisurely and largely aimless drive in the country on Sunday afternoon, then, was more a form of entertainment as gasoline was inexpensive and abundant; and, it would seem, so was time.

Admittedly, the reason Linda and I decided to set off on our Sunday Drive had little to do with leisure or aimlessness; at least initially. Early that morning before church, and as I shared with you later in worship, we received word that a family we have known for many years through the Canton Farmers Market had suffered the unimaginable loss of their son; unexpectedly and from his own hand. We decided to drive out to the farm to offer whatever solace and support we could.

III.

I don't get out to that part of the county all that much anymore: the area SW of Heuvelton along CR 184 in the town of Macomb; at least not since Rich and Ellen Grayson moved from there some years ago to their current home in Madrid. It is a beautiful and bountiful landscape, especially on such a lovely summer's day. It's all farm land and agriculture out that way, and home to a great many of our Amish brothers and sisters. We passed by house after house with neatly tended garden rows and acres of cropland for hay and corn. You could almost hear the verdant land growing and bursting with the life that would feed and sustain so many through the long winter to come. Horses frolicked in their paddocks; many of them draft animals used to pulled the plow and work the land. At a point, I realized that each house was empty, and that all of these farms momentarily idle; not even a stitch of clothing on the line to dry. "Of *course*," I said to myself, "it is Sunday; the Sabbath, a day of rest."

IV.

It was right about then that we passed by one particular farm and it had what must have been 25 or 30 buggies parked all around the house; an Amish church parking lot if you will. I noticed, though, that it was *just* the buggies, no horses were attached; perhaps they were in a barn, or some unseen pasture or hitching post.

Apparently, Amish church services are held every other Sunday, with the service itself typically lasting about three hours and consisting of singing, prayer and TWO sermons (count your blessings). Too long of a timespan to leave horses in halter. On the so-called "off Sunday" Amish go visiting, rest, and hold devotionals at home. Clearly, this was the "on Sunday" as they gathered to worship, pray, study and give thanks for the bounty of their lives together. It was quite a sight to behold, actually, all those buggies lined up and sitting idle after *their* Sunday Drive to church.

V.

Today's scripture reading, from various sections of Mark chapter 6, is something of a cautionary tale to those of us who labor in the vineyard of the Lord; though greatly condensed. The passage begins with Jesus gathering in the apostles to hear them tell of all they had done and taught; kind of a

debriefing session or after-action reporting. A few verses prior to this, Jesus had send them out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits. Jesus had commanded them to take nothing for the journey except a staff; no bag, no bread, no copper in their money belts; but to wear sandals, and not to put on two tunics. So, they had went out and preached that people should repent (make a change), and they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them.

VI.

We can only assume that Jesus was duly impressed with the work which had been accomplished, and fully cognizant of the effort it required. Aware the toll such work takes on the worker Jesus said to them, "*Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.*" We are told by the author, that many were coming and going, and they had no leisure...not even to eat.

So, Jesus and the apostles went away in a boat, to a deserted place, by themselves. Which is great. The only problem was it didn't *stay* deserted for very long. The passage goes on to explain that many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. By the time Jesus and the apostles landed, a great crowd had already gathered.

VII.

Though the Jesus and the apostles were, we can be sure, dog-tired, hungry, overwhelmed and possessing few reserves, what choice was there but to have compassion for these people? Because, we are told, they were like sheep without a shepherd; and they began to teach them many things. What this morning's passage fails to include is that rather than getting the rest and relaxation they so greatly deserved and desperately needed, they ended up feeding 5,000 people with only 5 loaves of bread and two fish. Then, even more exhausted than they had been, they tried once more to escape the crowds to find a moment's peace for themselves. So, they again set off in the boat and landed at Gennesaret. However, when they got out of the boat, people at once recognized Jesus, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was.

VIII.

And so it was for the entirety of Jesus' ministry; that wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, the people laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Jesus that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Though our christological understanding of the nature of Jesus the Christ recognizes him to be both fully God as well as fully human, the apostles and disciples who supported and worked along side of him in his ministry were nothing *but* human; and all *too* human at that. I think it is important for us to realize, the incredible demands which were placed on the followers of Christ in his day; but, also, the demands placed on all of us in this day and age, as we continue Christ's ministry of healing, hope and reconciliation. Most urgently for us today, however, is the very real need for us to get a little R&R; to get away to a deserted place all by ourselves and rest a while.

IX.

Of course, that *sounds* all well and good, but actually *doing* it proves to be a much more formidable task; *especially* in this day and age. I have no trouble admitting to you, on our Sunday Drive home to the lake last week after the prior week's Meet and Greet, fountain reopening, sermon writing, worship service, and visit with the family who has lost their son, I was DONE...put a fork in me done. We arrived back at the cottage, I had a quick lunch, made a first pass on the NYT Sunday crossword puzzle, and, finally, yielded to the siren song of the couch on the porch; I was OUT. Come Monday, I woke up and I knew what I needed most to do was NOTHING. But, heaven help me, I couldn't seem to slow down, let alone stop. Even though I didn't necessarily *need* to do anything, I kept finding the next thing I *thought* I needed to do. And, I'm not too proud to say, it was at this point I started to get a little freaked out; that I couldn't stop, slow down or rest awhile.

X.

Instead, I opted for my usual Plan B, what I always fall back on at such times: do something for myself or my family, and physically exhaust myself so that at the very least I stop *thinking* about how freaked out I'm getting. So, I mowed and weed-whacked the lawn at a furious pace for four hours without a break. It did the trick, that's for sure; a good first step at the very least. It is a

process, though, and I feel I have a long, long way to go. My recent pace quickened not just in the past few months, or even with the onset of the pandemic. If I'm being honest, this has been building since my mother had the stroke. Here is how I know, the canary in the coal mine lying dead at the bottom of the cage if you will: I haven't played my guitar, not really *played* it, in over 6 years. There was a time there when I picked it up every single day, and played out all over the area at local venues and, here, at the church.

XI.

I've been the proverbial frog put in a pot on the stove with the water slowly, over time, coming to a boil unnoticed. Well, I sure am noticing now. Clearly, I've got some serious work to do. However, my sense is I'm not alone in this particular boat, or pot as case may be; no siree Bob. Misery loves company, or so they say, and though I only have anecdotal evidence to support my hypothesis, I have a very strong suspicion the water has warmed for quite few of you.

I ran into Phil and Kelly last weekend at the fountain reopening; they told me they had spent a good part of their vacation painting rooms at their newly acquired dental practice. I walked out my back door last Saturday, to find my friend Jim putting in a sidewalk as a side-job for the folks who bought my mom's house next door to us. Said he was on vacation that week, and thought he'd get after it. I poured the 26 bags of concrete, at 80 pounds a bag, into the mixer so he could spread and smooth.

XII.

Most telling, though, is that Linda and I have been trying with little success to get some friends and families with young kids (mostly from the church) out to the lake this summer; seems like everyone else is just as busy as we are. While I'm glad we all have such full lives, and none of us can be accused of being idlers, I can't help but think that very few of us are finding that deserted place to get away to all by ourselves and simply rest a while; like Jesus and the apostles who keep getting met and followed around by the crowds. And, if the fact that you don't have any leisureliness and aimlessness in your life doesn't freak you out, even a little, maybe it *should*. Ask yourself this, when was the last time you and went with those you love for a Sunday Drive, literally or metaphorically?

XIII.

As my wife, Retreat Coach Linda, often tells her Wise Women during their monthly circle meetings or to those participating in one of her retreats: while you may not be able to change your *circumstances*, you can change how you *react* to those circumstances. Certainly, we can all endeavor to be intentional about having less to do in our lives; and we should. Given the times in which we live, however, and the inescapable dynamics which constitute life in every age and generation, such an effort will only go so far or have a limited impact. Better, then, to put our efforts and energies into changing how we *react* to our circumstances. For that, I'd like to offer a fairly simple, but not necessarily easy, solution: let us endeavor to stop seeing "doing nothing" as *wasting* time and, instead, start seeing it as *enjoying* the time we've been given.

XIV.

We are going to do so in two ways. First, to reinstate structures of sabbath into our lives. We may not be able to set aside a whole day each week to worship, pray, visit with those we love and simply rest, but we certainly can set aside small parts of each day to sit and simply stop moving or, even, just slow down the hamster wheel just a little bit. If the Amish can set aside a seventh of their hardscrabble lives each week, we can certainly set aside 7 minutes a day in ours. Remember, though, this is a *structural* change that has to be integrated into the social and familial aspects of our lives; everyone in our "pod" has to be on board. One of the biggest reasons the Amish succeed at keeping the Sunday sabbath, is that EVERYONE does it together.

XV.

Second, rather than being *burdened* by our lives, let us seek to discover and remember the *enjoyment* of them. Coach Linda would call this a "Gratitude Practice." Though there are lots of ways to do this, it all comes down to beginning the process of enjoying our lives by cultivating *gratitude*. Linda would suggest that every day we write down three things for which we are grateful. It can be different every day, or it can be the same three things every day: roof over your head, family to love, food on the table. The important thing is to take the *time* and make the effort *to write them down*. This serves to help us *cultivate* thankfulness so we begin to see the world through eyes of gratitude.

If you want to go deeper, write down *why* you are grateful for the roof over your head, the people you love and the food on your table. Or, deeper still, write a gratitude letter to thank someone for what they've done in your life or who they are in your life. However, one of the simplest and easiest things that we can do to enjoy our lives is to say grace before dinner; either alone, or as a family. That's why, for the past 20 years, we've include a different grace each month in the church newsletter.

XVI.

So, if you are feeling a little freaked out these days, or if my words today have served to freak you out, take a deep breath, and remember all you have, and all you have had, in your life. It is about small steps, and slow miles. And, if you are in the midst of a particularly hectic time of late, remember we take this Sunday Drive together *every* week, and there is always room for you, here in this church, to come along. Amen.