

Sermon

Proper 11B July 21, 2024

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

After last week's story about the demise of John the Baptist, we're back with Jesus. Jesus has sent out the twelve disciples in pairs on their first mission trip. They go with only the clothes on their backs, their sandals, and a staff, and they go with the authority to cast out demons.

Today's gospel story picks up after they've returned from that mission trip, and they are eager to tell Jesus all about it. We don't know how long they were away, but let's say it was three months – basically summer. They were on the road, visiting towns, preaching the good news, and casting out demons. For three months they were away from family and friends. Based on how Mark writes about this, it seems the trip was successful; but even successful trips need to end, and it's always good to be home. Jesus knows this, so he tells them to come away to a deserted place and rest awhile.

This reminds me of two stories. The first I've told before. A pastor was a work-a-holic and when someone asked why he never took time off, he said, "Because Satan never takes time off." The person responded, "You need a better role model."

The second one is a FB meme that various friends have posted: Do you remember that time in the bible when Elijah was so angry he wanted to die and God said, "Here, have some food and rest," and Elijah ate and took a nap and when he woke up he decided things weren't so bad? Never underestimate the spiritual power of snacks and a nap.

Life in the church can be hectic and stressful. When you add the responsibilities to all of the other responsibilities and obligations we have in our lives, it can very much seem like we have no leisure even to eat; and, truthfully, you all have a harder time than I do in that regard.

Let's be honest, the Church and this parish is my life. This is where I work and worship. This is where I meet people. Everything I do is here. But you all have lives and careers beyond these walls. For instance, there is a group of people who have jobs and obligations outside of church, yet they found the time to gather this past

week to begin working on the Harvest Hoedown. I am exceedingly grateful for their willingness to take on that task. That's but one example.

For my part, this past week has been filled with buying a house, relocating, coordinating movers, utilities, and mail, an airport run to Billings, going over service bulletins, and making sure everything was in place. When I told the bishop about the move, she apologized for the timing and asked if we should move the installation service. I told her absolutely not.

We are all busy with life and church and ministries, and sometimes there is no leisure even to eat. We need to find time to get away. To find a deserted place all by ourselves and rest awhile. We need to do this because others may not let us. Many people saw Jesus and the disciples heading out and rushed on ahead of them so that they were met by a great crowd. And although Jesus and the disciples need rest and look to find rest, no rest is to be found because of the continuing presence of the crowds.

There's a scene in Jesus Christ Superstar where, toward the end of the story, a mob of people are pushing in on Jesus looking to be healed and he finally yells, "Heal yourselves!" This scene in today's story makes me wonder if Jesus ever snapped.

Even Jesus needed rest. We need to find rest. We need to recharge. We need to remember that "No" is a complete sentence. This isn't to say we use rest as an excuse to get out of ministry or doing the work of the Church, because even though they needed rest, Jesus still taught, healed, and fed the crowd. But we do need to remember to take care of ourselves.

Jesus knew this. That's why he wanted to take his disciples away to a deserted place. It's why he went off on his own to pray. It's why he slept in the boat. Self-care, good boundaries, and knowing your limits are all part of our good health. This should be fairly obvious to us as individuals, but what might this mean for this church body, for us as a community of faith?

There is no doubt that we are living in hectic and frantic times where it seems we have no leisure even to eat. Even here in small Buffalo, people seem to be constantly busy. Cell phones and other technologies demand our immediate attention. And the list goes on.

With that in mind, what if this place worked at becoming known for being a place of rest? What if we became a place of contemplation? Could we offer Morning, Noon, and Evening Prayer Monday through Friday? Could we offer quiet days or times of meditation? And not just here physically, but when we get our livestreaming up and running, it has the potential to reach people well-beyond the boundaries of Buffalo.

One possible start to this is a labyrinth. A labyrinth, for those who don't know, is a prayerful or meditative walk used as a spiritual practice. We don't have much ground to work with, but we do have a nice spot by the Food Pantry. I've discussed the possibility of painting a labyrinth in that parking lot with the Vestry, and we're still working on it. But it could offer a respite for Pantry visitors, or people on Sunday, or any other day. That's one way to offer some quiet time.

As I was told during my interview, "We are looking for the next thing."

The next thing doesn't have to be grandiose. The next thing doesn't have to be legal counsel or day care or tutoring programs or or or. What if our next thing was simply to be a place of prayer, rest, and contemplation? And no, we may not ever be able to quantify the people touched, but if Saint Luke's became the downtown church of spiritual refreshment that would be vitally important for those served.

We have been called by Jesus to minister to those around us. As Elwood famously said, "We're on a mission from God." Maybe part of that mission is to be a place of rest in the midst of a hurried and harried people. Let us pray.

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy immortal one: Have mercy upon us.
Holy God, holy and mighty, holy immortal one: Have mercy upon us.
Holy God, holy and mighty, holy immortal one: Have mercy upon us.

Amen.