

## “COME AWAY”

Mark 6:30-32 August 26, 2018

Do you have a hard time saying “No” to other people? Have you ever felt overwhelmed by others in need? Have you ever wanted a few moments peace? What happened?

“If you ever want something done, ask someone who is busy.”

With the ever increasing pace of life, family, and friends, business associates and community groups ask more and more of our time. This is especially true if we have talents or treasures these groups desire. It seems the more we have to offer, the more people want from us. The time soon comes to get away, to refresh the body and soul. As with us, so too did the apostles need a quiet time and place to renew their spirits and their relationship with Jesus.

When they returned from their travels, the apostles met with Jesus and told him everything they did and said. “Come alone to a quiet place,” Jesus replied. “You can rest there a while.” So many people were coming and going Jesus and his apostles didn’t even have a chance to eat. So they left alone for their quiet place. As we talked about last week the problem was that the crowds wouldn’t leave them alone and tracked them down! And Jesus felt compassion for them and...”began to teach them many things.”

Sound familiar? Not a lot has changed in a couple thousand years, has it? There is still more work to be done than there are hours in a day, and burnout, fatigue, and stress related health issues are prominent among those who work in “helping” professions and vocations.

This week’s gospel lesson provides a strong wake-up call to all of us who have trouble saying no and overcommit our time and efforts. My friend, Lois, whose memorial service was Wednesday, was that kind of person. She was always busy—morning, noon, and night. I worried about her because she didn’t do the kind of self-care I thought she should. But she lived to be 91 so I guess it agreed with her. When she retired she substitute taught until she was 80 and enjoyed it! But I used to tell her that she was my example of how *not* to retire! Her son, Jeff, used to tell her she didn’t know the meaning of the word and I totally agreed. I wanted to retire and have time to fall asleep on the patio, reading my book! Well, I’ve retired twice so far and one of these days I will retire again and see if I can figure out what retirement really looks like!

If we want to be an effective disciple and leader, then we must be a good stewards of ourselves first. Think of the familiar instructions that flight attendants review before take-off, if the oxygen mask drops down, you had better put it on our own face in order to be prepared to help others. If we don't take care of ourselves, how can we possibly take care of God's people? And lest you think this admonition is solely directed at vocational church workers, think again. All of us as disciples need to be aware of good personal stewardship. Those of us who lead must also model effective stewardship of the self for others.

“Come away to a place where there are no cell phones, your iPad will not work, a place where you can rest and be recharged.” An attractive sounding invitation in the midst of our fast-paced, over-scheduled, information-filled days. Our busyness seems to preclude time for family meals, in-depth conversation with friends, times to just sit still for a few minutes in the silence. We seem to enjoy the hectic pace of our lives for seldom do I meet someone who is eager tell me about their down time, but I do often hear stories of busyness. Our culture supposes that activity and accomplishment are better than rest. We identify ourselves to one another most often by what we do rather than who we are. We find it easy to slip into a rhythm of activity that allows little time for refreshment of body and soul. Sabbath, meaning literally “to cease,” is a gift that invites us to step away from our over-scheduled, busy lives, and experience rest. An invitation to escape to a place apart where one can find Sabbath is enticing.

Mark's telling of the Jesus story has a frantic pace about it. In the sixth chapter of Mark, Jesus sends out his disciples in pairs to go among the villages and teach. He gives them power over unclean spirits. He instructs his disciples not to take food, a bag or money with them but to accept with gratitude the hospitality extended to them. Jesus says to his disciples, “If you are not welcomed, not listened to, don't make a big deal about it. As you leave simply shake the dust off your feet and keep going.” So they went out among the villages proclaiming repentance, casting out demons and healing many who were sick. When they returned, they could not wait to tell Jesus stories about their accomplishments.

As you might imagine by this time, Jesus and his disciples created quite a stir among the people, so they find it difficult to stop and rest much less eat a meal in peace. Even as Jesus listens to his disciples' stories, people are coming

and going. So Jesus says to his disciples, “Let’s go off by ourselves so we can rest, talk about the good you have accomplished and share a quiet meal together.” So they get in a boat and set sail for that deserted place with no cell phone reception, no wi-fi, no interruptions, just Jesus and his friends. Finally, a little time to leave the work at the office and forget any schedules and just rest.

As it turns out, Jesus is on to something. The rhythm of work and rest seems to help us human beings function better and feel better about ourselves. A recent study published in the *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* by a team from the University of Rochester-McGill University in Canada and Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond confirms what most of us know. People, regardless of income, working hours, profession or age feel better mentally and physically when they take time off from their labors. The report states, “Our findings highlight just how important free time is to an individual’s well-being.” Unscheduled time provides critical opportunities for bonding, exploring other interests and relaxation.

We know from our reading that Jesus observes the Sabbath. We have stories of Jesus being in the synagogue on the Sabbath. We also have stories of Jesus’ struggles with religious leaders over how the Sabbath is to be observed. He seems to focus more on appropriate behavior than on the significance of Sabbath observance. Earlier in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus teaches that Sabbath is a gift. It is a day to be freed from our labors to enjoy the creation and the Creator. He says, “The Sabbath was made for mankind, not mankind for the Sabbath.” The invitation of Jesus to his disciples to retire to a place where they can rest, take a deep breath, bond with one another and share in telling their stories is important for their well-being.

Who among us does not know that things do not always go as planned. As Jesus and the disciples cross the lake in a boat, word spreads that they are on the move. People set out on foot and reached the place Jesus has in mind as a place of rest. When Jesus and his disciples arrive on the shore, they find a crowd awaiting them. The crowd wants to hear what Jesus had to say. It’s part of the human experience to seek that which we find lacking in our lives. The crowd is hungry for an assuring word. They want desperately to be made well, and the word is out that Jesus offers what they most need.

The church is a place to address these needs, a community in which to find wholeness. Faith communities provide us the support and encouragement to

strive toward wholeness by caring for our bodies and our souls. We are called to places of rest where we can be still and know God. We are invited to bond with others in exploring the richness of God's grace. There is a shaping of the world afoot with an emerging spirituality that is concerned with self-care, with the care of others and with the care of the planet we call home.

Yesterday morning I was on the computer looking for my daily devotional. I never thought I'd say it but I actually get two each morning—and they are on my computer!?!?! Who would have thought? Anyway, I spot the title of the one for today from Guidelines for Living and it is “Seeking Quietness.” Now when I get such a strong nudge from the Lord I know I better pay attention. When I read it I knew I wanted to share it with you as a conclusion to today's message.

It begins with the scripture from 1 Thesalonians 4:11: “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you.”

Long before the age of jet airplanes, the Internet, or digital television, theologian Arthur Pink wrote the following: “what man despises, God esteems; and what man admires, He abominates. The world is man, and speed is one of the ‘gods’ which is now worshipped by the multitudes. And living as we yet are in the world, God's own people are infected with its evil spirit. Much need has each of us to beg the Lord to lay His cooling and calming hand upon the feverish ‘flesh’ in us. Rush, hurry, and hustle are the terms which best describe modern activities; but ‘stand’, ‘sit’, and ‘wait’ are words that have a prominent place in the Scriptures.”

Arthur Pink wrote those words in 1930! Now, the problem is even greater. Busyness has become a curse of our day. Carried over into the realm of the spiritual, we associate activity with spirituality. Thus we program more Bible studies, more activities, sometimes more church services, more conferences, and more things into an already overcrowded schedule.

Do you ever ask yourself, “What would Jesus do if He were here?” Would he jam more and more into His schedule, or would He walk away from the frenetic activity of life today and find a quiet place for solitude? Would He leave His computer to listen to the wind as it blows through the trees, or ponder the awesome, sometimes ferocious sound of silence?

Listening to the symphony of nature's music has a way of quieting the soul, of helping you think straight, of helping you sift through the dissonance of life today. There is something therapeutic about listening to the roaring clap of the surf pounding the seashore, or as I have done recently, sitting quietly in a forest and listening to the sound of the wind in the trees, the noise and creaks of the forest-voices which are generally unknown to us. If you ever have the opportunity, sit quietly on a mountain top at timberline where there is insufficient oxygen for much to grow and sit quietly and silently. You will discover that there is neither absolute silence nor quiet. It's a different sound that you hear—the kind of sound that is never heard in the city.

Isaiah told us that “in quietness and trust is your strength” but then he added, “but you would have none of it” (Isaiah 30:15). If he were alive today, he would say the same thing. Question: Whose fault is it, anyway, that life is so busy? Obviously, it is our own doing. Therefore the undoing of our busyness is also our obligation and should be one of the first orders of business.

When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians he told them to study to be quiet (1 Thess. 4:11, KJV)—something which was commanded. The word “quiet” means “to cease from labor, to hold your peace, to be still.” You might say, “Isn't there something in Psalms about that?” As a matter of fact there is. Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God.”

There are some things we will never know, we will never learn apart from the quiet place where we have escaped the din and pollution of noise. I'm not suggesting that you walk away from your family or business or obligations to become a hermit somewhere, but I am saying if you are to survive spiritually, emotionally, and physically, if you are to live so that stress and hypertension don't kill you, you've got to learn to find quiet time for rest and recuperation. There is still strength in the quiet place.

Will you RSVP to Jesus' invitation—“Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while”?

Let us pray: Almighty God, who after the creation of the world rested from all your works and sanctified a day of rest for all your creatures, grant that we, putting away all earthly anxieties, may be duly prepared for the service of your call upon our lives as your disciples, and that our rest here upon earth may be a preparation for the eternal rest promised to your people in heaven, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.