

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost  
Jeremiah 23:1-6  
Psalm 23  
Ephesians 2:11-22  
Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

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July 22, 2018  
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church

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Grace and Peace to you all from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – Amen.

This morning our texts give us a glimpse into God's thoughts and practices around rest, spiritual renewal, and compassion.

Whether it's the call of the prophet Jeremiah to entrust our lives to a good and righteous shepherd, the poetic words of the 23 Psalm urging us to follow Gods leading to peaceful pastures, or Jesus simple invitation to come away to a deserted place and rest for a while – I think these are all passages we need to hear and take to heart this summer. Because our lives can be so busy that I know we can all use a good and restful break from time to time. A need to find a deserted place to rest and reconnect with what is most important to us.

This need of ours for Sabbath and solitude is usually marked by some tell tale signs that we have all come to recognise in our own way. Signs that tell us our attention span is getting shorter and shorter than we are used to. Signs that point to the fact that we have become too easily irritated by the little things that get under our skin. Or signs that we can't so easily ignore – like when our families can't be in the space for longer than five minutes before threats begin to break out across the room.

These are all marks that come to remind us that it is time to slow down, rest, while finding compassion for ourselves and others as we reconnect with God.

A few weeks ago, after sensing a few of these signs for myself – my wife Dani and I packed up our car with our tent, supplies, and provisions and set off for Little Bow Provincial Camp ground just outside of Vulcan. After a wonderful drive down to Southern Alberta through golden fields cresting with canola, we wound our way down through the sleepy river valley to our campsite. And as we descended into the coulees, the bars of connectivity on our cell phones grew less and less until they were simply replaced by one phrase "no signal".

No emails, no texts, no phone calls, or telemarketers could reach us now.

We knew we had officially found our deserted place ... along with the 50 other families who had come to claim their own spot in paradise with their fifth wheel RV's, satellite TV's, Air Conditioning, and generators to power their set up.

So perhaps it wasn't as deserted as we had planned – but our quest for rest and renewal reminded me of our gospel reading this morning.

The text describes the return of the disciples from their first ministry tour. Exhilarated and exhausted they have stories to tell Jesus — thrilling stories of healings, exorcisms, and the life changing ministry they witnessed throughout their journeys. And perhaps there are darker stories in the mix too — stories of failure and rejection, hardship, and loss. Difficult stories they need to process privately with their Teacher before they feel they can continue on.

But as they return to find their teacher they begin to see Jesus is not in top form himself.

He has just lost his cousin John - his beloved and prophetic friend who baptized him and spent a lifetime in the wilderness preparing the way for their coming ministry. Worse than simply losing John to old age after a well lived life, Jesus has lost him to a tragic act of murder, a terrifying reminder that God's beloved are not immune to the senseless grip of death and pain within this world. And maybe in this moment the realness, the veil of Jesus own life and ministry begins to wear thin.

So upon his disciples return, Jesus senses that they're tired, overstimulated, and in significant need of rest and solitude – and just like himself, they could all use a break from the fast paced life of ministry within the world.

"Let's go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile," he says to his disciples as the crowd's pushed in around them at the edge of the sea. "Come away with me," is how another translation puts it, and I hear both tenderness and longing in those words. Yes, Jesus wants to provide a time of rest and recuperation for his friends. But he's also weary himself – and we can hear that in his words and throughout the scriptures in these minor verses.

Verses that give us key glimpses of Jesus' *human* life — the life I can relate to most readily. His need to withdraw, his desire for solitary prayer, his physical hunger, his sleepiness, his inclination to hide away from the world from time to time.

To me these glimpses take nothing away from Jesus' divinity - they enhance it - making it richer and all the more mysterious. They remind me that the truth of the Incarnation is Christianity's best gift to the world. A truth that says God - the God of the whole universe — hungers, sleeps, eats, rests, withdraws, and grieves alongside us all.

But Jesus is also like us - in that sometimes his best-laid plans go awry.

According to Mark's gospel this morning Jesus "retreat by the sea" fails time and time again. The crowds anticipate his plan to get away and by the time he and his disciples reach their longed-for destination, the crowds were waiting, and the quiet sanctuary Jesus and his disciples had been seeking had been turned upside down.

And this is where something interesting begins to take place.

Jesus doesn't whisk his disciples off to club med to make sure they get their rest at any cost.

He doesn't run.

And he doesn't ignore the cries of the crowd.

As Mark puts it, "Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began to teach them many things."

In the second half of this week's gospel – we essentially hear a repeat of this first scene. After Jesus and the disciples tended to the needs of the crowd he calls the disciples to get back in the boat to try to find another deserted place.

But once again, the crowds anticipate Jesus' plan, and word spreads that they are moving on, and as soon as the boat lands at Gennesaret, the crowds go wild, pushing and jostling to get close to Jesus. They carry their sick to him on mats. In every village and city Jesus approaches, swarms of people needing healing line the marketplaces. They press against him. They plead. They beg to touch the fringe of his robe and receive healing.

Jesus' response? Once again, his response is compassion. "All who touched him were healed."

While this response may be hard for us to believe - this is where Jesus divinity touches down to remind us of our own human need not for desolate isolation but to be called into healing and compassionate communities. Communities where we can feel safe to name when we are feeling like we are wearing thin. Places where we know our grief and pain can be heard and held by another who has also shared a similar road. A community not unlike the disciples, who were called to the work of the kingdom – but asked to find a balance in meeting their own needs as well as tending to the people God has placed before them.

So yes - I think this week's Gospel reading is about rest, spiritual renewal, and compassion – but I also think its about something more. I think it's also about recognizing the holy unrest of the ongoing and necessary tension between our own self-care and our call to be with and among the world as God's people.

A tension Jesus lived with and embraced throughout his ministry.

On the one hand, he was unapologetic about his need for rest and solitude. He saw no shame in retreating when he and his disciples needed a break. But on the other hand, Jesus never allowed his weariness to overwhelm his compassion for those in need.

Here, in my comfortable middle-class life, it can become too easy to pass the buck on compassion. Whether I'm looking at the needs of my own family, my seemingly self-sufficient neighbors, or the wider community, it's tempting to tell myself that someone else will help. Everything can wait. After all, I'm not the last stop, am I?

Unlike my sometimes short-sighted decisions, Jesus realized that he *was* the last stop for those aching, desperate crowds — those sheep without a shepherd. Unlike me, his answer to these demanding crowds and his own personal boundaries were a both/and rather than an either/or. Jesus was aware that he did have compassion to give and that he would find rest eventually with his disciples.

So is there a lesson for us here this morning? Strive for balance? Recognize weariness when you feel it? Don't apologize for being human? Take breaks? Try to be compassionate?

Yes. All of these things are essential. But maybe also — and most importantly — this: We live in a world of dire and constant need. Sheep die without their shepherds. There *are* stakes, and sometimes, what God demands of our weary hearts is compassionate understanding and love – even in the face of our own need.

While balance will always remain the ideal, it won't always be available in the short-term. Sometimes, we will have to do the best we can to rise to the needs before us as they

come. And sometimes this will mean we'll have to bend out of balance for the sake of the good news we have so longed to hear ourselves.

And so when we feel the Spirits call to action, when we are a tired and worn-out and yet can see there is work yet to do. In what direction should we bend? If this week's Gospel story is our example, then the answer is clear. We are to "err" bending on the side of compassion. Because after all we know Jesus did – and he is calling us and the disciples to continue to.

And so this morning it is my prayer that we would all find the rest, peace, and comfort we need - but that in seeking to find these ourselves we would not close ourselves off from a world in need.

And May this be so among us – Amen.