

Mark 6:30-34 - ³⁰The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” ³²So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

Jesus gives rest

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

(Matthew 11:28)

What makes you tired? You hear a question like that and think, “My goodness, how much time have you got?!” Work, school, running the kids from A to B and back to A before making your way to C. What makes you tired? How about working outside in this heat and humidity for more than 2 minutes? You get home at the end of a long day and plop down on the couch nearest to the front door and it doesn’t take five minutes before your eyes droop, and you start wondering whether 8:00 pm is too early for a grown-up bedtime. 21st century Americans live and move and have their being in fast days with full schedules. It never seems to stop! So when the moment finally comes when you can sit still and everything is quiet – you’re exhausted! You pour yourself into bed and a short night goes by before you’re up and at it again. Physical fatigue is something each one of us can relate to, and the only remedy for it is quite simple: rest. But rest always seems like this vague impossibility – out there somewhere for someone else, but probably not for me. We need rest, because without it, nothing goes right. In fact, without rest, quite a bit can go wrong. Try doing your job on 2 hours of sleep instead of 6, 7, or 8, and see how that goes. You’re sluggish, you’re cranky, you’re not at the top of your game. Go for extended periods of time without proper rest and statistically, you’re more likely to develop some bigger problems – heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and more. Physical fatigue is not uncommon – we’ve all been there. But what about spiritual exhaustion? Have you ever found yourself there? When it’s your search for happiness and fulfillment that’s turning up nothing? When your life seems to be a testimony to the inevitability of Murphy’s Law rather than to the power of the gospel? When it’s your guilt from the past or your fear of the future that’s robbing you of any restful peace? It’s enough to wear us out, weigh us down, and cause us to lose hope. If you’ve ever been there, then learn again with the disciples today that Jesus gives rest.

In our gospel lesson for today, Mark records the apostles’ return to Jesus after he’d sent them out two by two to preach repentance – a turning away from sin and trusting in the Savior. **The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.** How excited they must have been to share with Jesus all their experiences. *The Word works!* **Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”** Have you ever had a day like that? When you look at the clock, see that it’s 4:00 pm and think, “Hey, I don’t think I ate lunch today.” Jesus’ disciples needed that invitation to rest. They’d been busy – taking the message of the kingdom of God to the corners of the kingdom of Israel. They’d been preaching and teaching and driving out demons. They’d been dealing with people, which can be an exhausting endeavor. They were tired, but probably not just because they’d been busy telling people about Jesus. If you’d open up your Bible to Mark 6 and look at the verses just before this lesson, you’d see why else the disciples might’ve been in need of some rest and retreat. John the Baptizer, the rock star preacher of repentance, had been put to death; beheaded as a drunken party favor. You can see how that could take the wind out of their sails, can’t you? John the Baptizer was a preacher of repentance...and Jesus had sent his disciples out with the exact same message! *If something so awful happened to John, what’s in it for us?!* Physically, mentally, emotionally drained, the disciples heard that gentle invitation from the One who gives the rest he promises: Jesus. **Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.**

Isn’t this the same thing Jesus does for you and me? He calls us away from earthly things that are temporary and vain pursuits that can never satisfy, and he himself gives us freely and fully what we most desperately need but didn’t even know – his rest. **Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.** What do you suppose Jesus and his disciples were doing in that short time they got to spend together – taking a nap on the mountainside? Zoning out on the couch for six episodes of House Hunters? No! Not that there’s anything wrong with napping or

July 8, 2018 The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

House Hunting, but here's the point: Time spent doing nothing can be valuable for the human, but time spent alone with Jesus is priceless. Did you catch a common thread that ran through all our lessons and our psalm for today? The picture of a shepherd, and Jesus as the ultimate, great Shepherd of the sheep. When Jesus, the Good Shepherd, calls and invites us to rest, he's going to provide it; feeding us in the green pastures of his gospel promises fulfilled, giving us living water to drink, restoring our souls – and all of it he does through his Word.

But is that the kind of rest you're looking for? In a lifestyle of fast days and full schedules, maybe we'd like a different kind of rest. *The promises of the gospel are great and all, but those are for later. I need something right now!* The LORD is my Shepherd...but I still want. If only he'd make me lie down in green pastures of having enough green dollar bills to secure my family's future – then I could be at peace. The LORD is my Shepherd...but I still want. If only he'd lead me beside the quiet waters of never having to experience the pain, rejection, and hardship that Jesus promised would come – then I could really rest. The LORD is my Shepherd...but I still want. If only he'd guide me in the paths of success and growth for the sake of my name and fame! By nature we look for peace and security and rest in all the wrong places. We look in ourselves for something we're powerless to produce. We think that if we can orchestrate everything in our lives to be “just so,” and maximize this and minimize that, and put these people around us, then we'd have peace and rest, but we're just becoming a god of our own making and pushing the Savior out of the picture. Because of our sins, we deserved to be harassed and helpless, lost and alone, doomed for destruction. But then Jesus showed up...

Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest, he told his disciples. But their time for rest was cut short. **So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.** The people who had been following Jesus saw him get into the boat and ran to the other shore, banging down the door to be with Jesus. Jesus had taken his disciples aside for a time to teach them and give them rest, but the people kept coming! How do you like it when you get a work call on your day off, or when someone shakes you awake in the middle of the night? We're not so keen on people interrupting our rest time - so watch the way Jesus responds, and marvel. He doesn't turn the crowds away and say, “Go home, it's my day off,” even though he knows every one of their hearts and the intentions they hold. Jesus knew their sin. Jesus knew which ones were hardly paying attention. Jesus knew which were only looking for a free meal or a glimpse at a miracle. Jesus knew them, each and every one, but here they are, seeking him out and ready to listen. He looked out over that crowd of sinners and had every right to turn away in disgust, but that's not what he does. To the people who have nothing to offer, he gives everything.

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. Jesus looked out at the crowd and it hit him like a punch in the gut, literally, because these poor people were like sheep without a shepherd. Think about that for two seconds – What is a sheep like without a shepherd? Alone, distracted, oblivious to the danger all around them, helpless to survive without outside help. Oh sure, those people had leaders who called themselves their shepherds – shepherds in the spirit of Jeremiah 23. Remember what the Lord had to say about those guys in our Old Testament lesson? **Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!** Faithless kings and false prophets scattered the flock. The rabbis and teachers of the law were pointing people not to the rest found in the good news of the gospel, but pointing people to manmade laws and filling their heads and hearts with the notion that this is how you stand righteous before a holy God. One more noticeable step of improvement here, another rung climbed on the ladder there. So do you see why Jesus would feel so strongly? Mark used the word “compassion,” but there's more going on than a surface emotion. From the very depths of himself; his intestines churning; like reeling from a punch in the stomach, Jesus felt for these people. The needs of those people consumed him, even if it wasn't consuming them. To those people who had nothing to offer, Jesus gives everything.

To these people who have nothing to offer, Jesus gives everything, even his own life. In order to provide the rest he promises, Jesus had to take care of the biggest problem of all – not our busy schedules or our financial shortfalls – our sin. Our need for true and eternal rest so consumed him that he let himself be weighed down by the burden of our sins. Our need for peace so consumed him that he let himself be swallowed up by the death that was rightfully ours. And when he walked out of his tomb on Easter Sunday, he guaranteed that sin is conquered, Satan is condemned, death is crushed, and heaven is certain. What better rest could you want? And what's best of all – you know exactly where to find it. Take time to rest with Jesus in his Word, because it's the most important part of your day. Megan, what a thing to say on your installation day! Here you are, full of energy and enthusiasm, ready to get to work, and I stand up and talk about resting. And I mean it – and the same goes for everyone else! Before you jump into your busy day – rest with Jesus in his Word. In the middle of what seems like organized chaos – rest with Jesus in his Word. There will be days when life doesn't seem so restful; when relationships are strained; when schedules are packed; when nothing seems to go the way you want – find the only rest that can satisfy in Jesus' Word of promise. And then, with a heart filled with the peace and rest only Christ can give, you're ready to share that rest with a world exhausted by sin. Husbands, share that rest with your wives. Workers, share that rest with your coworkers. Teachers, show it to your students. Parents, share that rest with your kids.

When I think about people sharing the rest they have in Christ, I think of my parents. Whether formally or informally, my parents showed me where to find rest, always pointing me back to what the Word says. My dad was my pastor, who always pointed me to Christ. But one of my most vivid memories from childhood was waking up for our 4:30 am paper route and walking into the kitchen to see my mother standing by the counter, practically asleep on her feet. Fatigue doesn't even begin to cover it – a mother of 14 who also ran a childcare from home for other people's kids, an active volunteer in church, this woman had been awake and on her feet for the better part of three decades... And there she was - falling asleep standing at the kitchen counter, reading her Bible, straining to hear just a few more words from her Good Shepherd. Who does that? Someone who knows the kind of rest Jesus gives, and by God's grace you know the kind of rest Jesus gives – forgiveness for every sin, promises that never fail, love that knows no limit and has no end, all for you. In a life of fast days and full schedules; in a world and a life exhausted by sin, remember – Jesus gives rest, and he gives it just for you.

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

(Hebrews 13:20-21)