

God invites us to rest and renewal

Sermon preached at the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, Marietta, GA

by The Rev. Tom Pumphrey, July 22, 2018

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 11, Year B)

(2 Samuel 7:1-14a; Ephesians 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56)

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56 (NRSV):

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.

Good Morning! It is a joy to be with you again, after a couple of weeks of vacation. I spent some time kayaking and time with my wife and son, and I had a chance to pray and to worship at some different churches on my weekends off. God blessed me on this vacation time, and I hope that God blesses you with some sabbath rest this summer. How many of you have taken some time off this summer? How many of you have taken a special trip—even if it is across town? There is something so important about times of rest and renewal.

Without rest, we say that we get burned-out. What a metaphor! We burn out all our fuel, we exhaust our resources; we lose our liveliness and run out of energy; we get disconnected from our sense of purpose. We need times where we can rest and restore and become fresh and energized, ready to take on our tasks with more positive outlook and new vision. This is actually part of the vision that God has for us. God invites us to times of rest and renewal.

We see something like this happening with Jesus and his disciples in today’s Gospel reading. Even Jesus took time away from the crowds and his teaching and healing ministry. Before this scene, Jesus sent out the Apostles in pairs to preach the good news, to heal and deliver people from evil. They faced challenging adversaries and villages sometimes rejected them. When they returned to Jesus, they gathered around him to tell him all that they had done and taught. So, Jesus tells 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.” Jesus invites his disciples to a time of rest and renewal.

Jesus is not introducing something new. God’s covenant with his people included keeping the Sabbath day holy, in part by refraining from work. Instead of bringing in the harvest or planting seed or working with the animals, the people were to trust that God would provide for them. They would honor God with their time and their attention. The Sabbath is about rest from labor, but the Sabbath is *The Lord’s Sabbath*. In the Lord’s Sabbath rest, God not only invites us to rest; God invites us to renewal.

The Sabbath rest and the rest to which Jesus invites his disciples has a purpose. The purpose of the Sabbath is to glorify God, and to be renewed and strengthened in relationship with God. When God invites us to rest *with him*, it is not merely for relief but for growth and strength and indeed preparation.

Today's lectionary skips over a huge section in Mark, chapter 6. It skips from verse 35 to verse 52, and we then hear of Jesus' return across the lake and his continuing in ministry. But what happened in between was the feeding of the 5000. We will hear this story next week (though we will hear of it from John rather than Mark). So here Jesus takes his apostles away to a deserted place to be with him and to share with him. And in the middle of their time together, more than 5000 people show up!

Jesus has compassion on them and begins to teach them—for they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then, after all this, when the disciples suggest that Jesus send the crowds away for dinner, Jesus answers the Disciples “you feed them.” Imagine if we went on a vestry retreat¹ up in the mountains for a weekend, and in the middle of the vestry retreat, 5000 people show up! Then the rector says “let's have a lecture series, and you, vestry, you will feed them!”

But isn't that so often what happens? Just when we're tired from all the regular stress of life, when we feel drained and stretched, when we're balancing the maximum we can handle, then the recession hits; the diagnosis comes in; the test grade tanks; the friend walks away. Just when we're done raising children, our parents move in. Just when we made it through Junior year, Senior year begins—all with new challenges greater than the old ones. We often don't know what to do or how to handle anything more. We are out of resources, but we're called to give again. Sometimes we're inclined just to run away. But that isn't the kind of rest God invites us to experience. God invites us to rest and to renewal, a rest and renewal *in Christ*.

Look what happened with those tired disciples who followed Jesus to a deserted place for their time with him. Jesus asked more of them and they felt empty of resources. Yet they took five loaves and two fish and with Jesus' blessing, they fed over 5000 people. They collected twelve baskets full of leftovers. When God calls you to something, God also strengthens you for that calling. God not only invites us to rest; God invites us to renewal.

Part of the genius of the Sabbath is that when we connect with God together on Sunday, we connect with God more through the week. When we hear from scripture and pray and share in the sacraments, we build a habit of reaching out to God, listening for God, opening ourselves to God's direction and God's wisdom. We learn to recognize God, we learn to understand how God works and we learn to see God at work in us and around us.

Then when we go back home to the struggle, when we return to the grind at work or the pressures of school, then we arrive strengthened. Instead of returning to daily lives with nothing changed, we arrive changed ourselves. We learn to find God at work in us and around us even in those stressful places too. We even learn to recognize God's presence and power alive and active in the midst of crisis and stress and even loss. God invites us to rest and renewal so that we can live close to God no matter what challenges we face.

¹ The Vestry is the board of elected lay leaders in an Episcopal parish.

A break without God is like a dead cell phone without a charger. Simply turning the phone off will not give it more charge. Simply turning off a car won't fill its tank. Simply breaking from work won't strengthen you to return. But plugging in, and filling up, and rebuilding your strength changes you when you return, and changes the work.

God's rest is not about escape or self-indulgence. God's rest is about God strengthening us, about God nourishing growth in us, about God equipping us for the road ahead. So we come here seeking not solace only, but also strength, not for pardon only, but also renewal. The grace of encountering God here in Christian Community and in the sacrament is to be filled with God's presence and power and sent out into the world renewed and transformed.

We encounter God in word and Sacrament. We encounter God when we share our lives with each other, praying for each other and sharing the insights God has given us. God strengthens all of us together when the Holy Spirit moves through us as we support each other, and as we learn from each other. We may practice this on our Sabbath day, but we can continue to receive God's grace every day in these ways as we connect with God and as we stay connected this each other. God invites us to rest and renewal in him, so that we might thrive in all our circumstances.

God empowers us to see him with us, to look through his eyes, and to give from the storehouse of God's resources miracles we never thought possible. With God's grace, fed by God's rest, we can bring that grace and renewal and joy to a world burn out and weary and eager for new life.

I pray that God gives you that kind of rich sabbath experience this summer and throughout the year. Now glory to God whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to him from generation to generation in the church and in Christ Jesus our Lord.