



The Westminster Pulpit

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“Rest awhile...” **Sermon on Mark 6:30-44**

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The Gospel of Mark is a frenetic gospel. It is a Gospel told on the run. It is out of breath! It's a long runoff sentence, held together by a string of "ands." And he went here. And, he said this. And he did that. And today, we are in the sixth chapter of Mark's Gospel.

An up and down fast-paced chapter. In it, Jesus comes back to his hometown and is rejected.... "Isn't this the carpenter?" Jesus quickly moves on, sending his disciples out two-by-two with nothing. No food, no bag, no money. Sent out with nothing but the authority of God. And they do well! Proclaiming repentance, casting out demons, and healing the sick.

And then, we are invited to King Herod's birthday banquet where the provocative dancing of the King's daughter leads to John the Baptist's head being served on a platter.

And then, we are invited to the Lord's banquet. And to slow down... and rest awhile...

Mark 6:30-44

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 it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they

may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.' But he answered them, 'You give them something to eat.' They said to him, 'Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?' And he said to them, 'How many loaves have you? Go and see.' When they had found out, they said, 'Five, and two fish.'

Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

"Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile."

Put to rest the frenetic world. Put the phones away. Eliminate the distractions. I can hardly do it. I try to rest. And then I see the cobwebs on the windowsills, and before you know it, I'm up with the broom and Windex, and "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile."

What is it with resting? Are we just hardwired to fidget and work, accomplish, and do?

Is it that we have so much, too much, that it requires 24/7 attention?

Is it "to whom much is given, much is expected," and "What have you done today?" And if you say, "Nothing," people will look at you like you're sick. "Are you feeling alright?" "Yes, I'm just resting."

We are on this earth for a reason. We have purpose-driven lives, and we don't want to disappoint! Life is hard enough with Chick-Fil-A closed on Sunday mornings, but now you're closed, too?

But the Word of the Lord says to us, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile." How do you hear that?

I suppose you can hear it as an invitation. Invitations to which you can RSVP, "Maybe not today, but later on." It's nice to have an invitational relationship with the Lord. "When I'm ready, Lord, I'll invite you in." That way you keep the power in the relationship. Just use the Lord when you need the Lord.

"Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile." What if this is not an invitation, but a command? Like the commandment, "Thou shall remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy." Would making it a command change anything?

"If I'm elected, I'll put the Ten Commandments in every classroom in the country, and unlike my opponent, I will mandate that they be on the final exam."

How did you do on the final exam? “I got seven out of ten. Seventy per cent is a passing grade! I messed up on coveting, keeping the Sabbath, and that thing about other gods.

It’s precisely that attitude that made James write in his letter, James 2:10, “Anyone who obeys the law and then breaks one of the laws, has broken all the laws.” Did you hear that? It’s 100% or nothing.

Because what James is saying is if you break the Sabbath, you’re guilty of stealing, you’re guilty of adultery, you’re guilty of murder. That’s pretty harsh! There you are, getting strapped into the electric chair. “Do you have any last words?” “I had no idea pulling up a dandelion on Sunday morning would lead to this.” (Fred Craddock sermon-*The Whole Law*) If you break the Sabbath, you’re guilty of murder?

“Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile.” Of all the commands of Jesus, this one is easy.

Much harder are the commands to “love your enemy.” “Pray for those who persecute you.” Not on my list. “Do not let your hearts be troubled! Don’t be afraid!” But “Come away to rest awhile..?” We should be able to do that one with our eyes closed. There’s always something that interferes with that rest.

The disciples obey and then go away to that deserted place, only to find that there are 5,000 people! Where can I get away from you people?

If I ascend to heaven you are there.

If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limit of the sea even there... there you are. (Psalm 139 in reverse.)

What do you do when your Sabbath looks like work?

My wife and I were in Victoria, British Columbia, and we enjoyed sitting on a park bench together. Had you all shown up there, that would’ve been it. I’d be mad!

“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.”

I have no idea what he taught them. Except that, he taught them a lesson about rest.

Here’s the lesson: when life doesn’t go as you want it to go, when life is just one problem after another and there doesn’t seem to be any solution; when you’re exhausted and it’s getting later, and there’s still more things to do, you can still get some rest. You can rest because if you have eyes to see and ears to hear, you are in the hands of a shepherd who has the situation well in-hand, and the desire of the shepherd is for you not to want. “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” Listen to him as he makes you lay down in the green grass, leads you beside the still waters, restores your soul.

In the busyness and frenetic pace and the and, the and, the and of this world, God can show up in the midst of it, this good shepherd. God will let you know that God has this in-hand. Or you can keep on running.

You can say a prayer:

“Lord, I’m going to retire from running the world... from running this, that, and the other thing... from stressing and worrying, and I’m seeking your power and your guidance. I’m going to rest in you.

I remember the story of the old greyhound. Do you remember that story? (My memory from: *Craddock Stories*) So, I didn’t know this, but greyhounds retire. My dog has never worked a day in her life, but greyhounds work to make a living and they retire at a pretty early age. I didn’t know that until Fred, a friend of mine, rescued a greyhound. I came by to see his family for one reason or another, and there was that tall, skinny, translucent, leggy thing. He was in the den with Fred’s boys, who were intertwined with the leggy thing watching television. The greyhound lifted his eyes up and looked at me, and said, “What are you looking at?” I said, “I’m looking at you. I thought you’d be old, gray, and worn out! You look great! Why aren’t you racing?”

“Were you not fast enough?” “No, I was at the top of my game!

“Were you injured? Pull a hamstring?” “No, healthy.”

“Well, why aren’t you running?”

“I just quit.” “You just quit?”

“You see, all my life I ran, and ran, and ran, and ran, and ran, and ran. And then I discovered the thing I was chasing wasn’t even real.”

Now you and I, we run, we run, we run. We’re going here, we’re getting this, doing that. And when you get to the end of life, what’s real? Is it all that stuff? It’s not even real.

What’s real is the stuff that lasts. Alpha and Omega, the beginning, the end, and everything in between – the eternal. Come away to a deserted place and here’s what you can learn: that Jesus is the Son of God. Rest in the banquet of love, and he’ll teach you many things. Not the least of which is: be still and know that I am God.

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