

“MARKS OF DISCIPLESHIP: III – RESTING”

Karen F. Bunnell

Elkton United Methodist Church

July 22, 2018

Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56

A few years ago, I preached a four-part sermon series on the Gospels, and in it I pointed out their similarities and differences. I talked about how Matthew, Mark and Luke are very similar – they are called the synoptic Gospels, and John sort of stands on its own. I talked about how Matthew was written particularly to the Jewish people, which is why at the very beginning of Matthew you see a genealogy, which connects Jesus to his Hebrew roots. And throughout Matthew, you see repeated references to the prophecies in the Hebrew scriptures, and how Jesus is the fulfillment of those prophecies.

Luke was a physician and not only wrote the Gospel of Luke, but also the Book of Acts. Luke is the storyteller, and in Luke you find those familiar parables, like the lost sheep, the lost coin, the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son.

As I said earlier, John stands on its own. It is a very theological book, and speaks in beautiful, even poetic ways of who Jesus is – the light of the world, the bread of life, and so on.

And then there's Mark, the Gospel we're looking at more closely this summer. Mark wrote his Gospel with a real sense of urgency, because when Jesus said he would come again, they believed it would happen any time. So Mark wanted people to be ready, he is urgent in his writing, and urgent in the way he tells Jesus' story. He doesn't, like the others, start with Jesus' birth. In fact, he doesn't even mention it. Mark starts with Jesus' baptism, the beginning of his ministry, because what's important to Mark is not the details of his birth, but the importance of his life, and the importance of his followers to be ready for his return.

That sense of urgency that Mark writes about not only surrounds Jesus, but also his disciples. A few weeks ago, we looked at the passage where Jesus sent them out two by two. They had been largely shadowing him in the beginning of their time with him, but then he sent them out two by two, in ministry together.

And where we find them today, is when they have returned from their missions for him. It appears that the urgency of Jesus' ministry has infected them as well, because they are weary. We don't know all the details of their sojourns, but if they were anything like Jesus thought they would be, the disciples would have indeed been worn out, from relying on others for food and lodging, to not having changes of clothes, to having to kick the dirt off of their feet because they were rejected by those to whom they came to minister.

So here they are today back with the Master, no doubt wiped out and weary. How do we know that? Look at what Jesus says to them. “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” He sees the toll their work has taken on them. He knows from his own experience how the work was intense, the attention from crowds sometimes overwhelming, and times to take a break almost impossible. He also knows that if they don’t take a break, they won’t be any good for him or for themselves.

So he invited them to take a break and rest a while, and he did that, because it was a practice he undertook regularly. Search the gospels and you will see how often it says that Jesus went off by himself, or Jesus went up into the hills to pray, or Jesus took long walks for peaceful solitude. He knew how important it was to step off the treadmill every once and a while, and to regain a sense of balance in his life.

He also knew that when you’re worn out, you can’t give. You can’t give, when you don’t have. Or as one pastor put it, “You can’t give from a place that is empty.” (On-line, Rev. Sharon Hiers, “RSVP to Jesus” 7/19/09)

The disciples were worn out, they were empty. And they and Jesus knew busy days were ahead, because the scripture tells us that, even then, crowds were ahead looking for them. So before very long, they would be overwhelmed with ministry again.

Now, I know the answer to the question I’m about to ask without even asking it, but ask it I will. Have you ever felt like those disciples? Overwhelmed? Worn out? Tired of doing and doing and doing? Tired of people constantly asking things of you, needing things from you? Tired of trying to get everything done? Feeling all alone, like nobody understands?

We live in a fast-paced, busy, busy world. In fact, one commentator named David Lose, maintains that we are “enslaved to busyness.” Listen to his jarring words:

“We are enslaved to notions of success, and therefore put few limits on work. We are enslaved to ideas about our children having every opportunity possible, and therefore schedule them into frenetic lives and wonder why they have a hard time focusing. We are enslaved to the belief that the only thing that will bring contentment is more – more money, more space in our homes, more cars, more things to put on our resumes or in our closets, more . . . Go ahead (he finishes), name that thing you’ve fallen prey to wanting more of. And such levels of wanting, quite frankly, don’t permit much time for anything but work.” (On-line, David Lose, “Rest,” 7/15/12)

Now, maybe that’s a little much for you and doesn’t describe your life, but I think it’s safe to say that, by and large, we are busy people – too busy. And too often, we get worn out, and as Jesus said, when you’re worn out, you’re empty and have nothing to give.

Let me give you a picture of what that looks like. It's shared by the Rev. Bill Hybels, who was the founder and senior pastor of Willow Creek Church, one of the first mega-churches in our country. Listen to what happened to him.

He says he was absolutely overwhelmed with things to do to keep building up the ministry at Willow Creek. He was working day and night, getting way too little rest. He began to have a short fuse, snapping at people, and generally not being happy. He was, in a word, depleted. And everyone who loved him knew it. Finally, one day his wife and kids suggested (strongly) that he go away by himself to the family cottage on a lake in Michigan, get some rest, and get his act together.

So he packed a duffel bag and off he went. When he got to the cottage, he was irritated to see that there were no provisions there. Whoever had been there last, had wiped out all the cupboards, so now he had to go into town and get some food.

Huffing and puffing, he drives into the town, goes to the market, fills his basket, goes through the check out and heads toward the door, still inwardly irritated that the ungrateful occupants of the cottage before him had left nothing there.

Well, he looks up just as he's approaching the door, and sees a Vietnam vet in a wheelchair also approaching the door at the same time. And this is what went through his mind. "Great! Now, I'll have to wait for him too. What else could go wrong for me today, God? What else could go wrong?"

And in that moment, Hybels says, "God took the scales off my eyes, and I looked into the cesspool of resentment, exhaustion and darkness that filled my heart. And I'm not kidding you – when I saw it in all its ugliness, I felt my knees grow weak." (Bill Hybels, *Simplify*, p 10)

Bill Hybels tells that story to others in the hope that they won't let that happen to them, that they'll do as Jesus says, and come away and rest a while, come apart so they don't "come apart at the seams."

There's another reason to "come away and rest" as well. When you're so worn out, it's hard to leave space in your life for anything new and energizing. You're just doing and doing and doing, and not leaving space for being and dreaming.

Preacher Leonard Sweet tells about going to meet with a mentor in Chicago who was schooling him in the art of fundraising. He says that the first time his mentor sent him to make a phone call to a prospective donor, he went over to a bank of phone booths, sat down, and tried to get the light to come on. Try as he might, he could find no switch. Finally, exasperated, he returned to his mentor and said "How do you get the light to come on?" Do you know what the mentor said? "Did you try closing the door?"

Sure enough, Sweet says, “the lights came on once I first closed the door.” And then he observed this: “Lights don’t come on unless you first shut some doors. Life doesn’t come into focus unless you first stop. If your life doesn’t have an ‘off’ switch, it will never turn on,” (he says).

On that day long ago, Jesus invited the disciples to hit the “off” switch, to come away and rest, so that they could be renewed, rejuvenated, and open to new possibilities. And, he invites us to do that as well.

So, how do we do that? Well, let me throw out some ideas this morning, and actually, congratulate you, because all of you are doing it right now. You have come away from your busy world, stepped off the treadmill, and are here in worship. Here nothing is expected of you but to be in the presence of God and your brothers and sisters in Christ. Here you have intentionally stepped away from all the voices calling out for your attention, all the things on your “to do” list, all the expectations you have of yourself and others have of you. Here you open your heart and simply dwell in the presence of God.

Oh, as you are well aware, so many people these days, don’t do that, but you do. Congratulations! You’re doing what Jesus wants you to do – coming away for a while and resting in Him!

Leonard Sweet, in his book *The Jesus Prescription for a Healthy Life*, offers ideas on other ways to “come away for a while.” He talks about the importance of laughter – find ways to laugh, to get rid of the tension and busyness in your life. Watch a funny movie or TV show, spend time with kids and watch them laugh, you’ll find it infectious.

Likewise, Sweet says, have some play time. Do whatever it does that brings you joy – whether that’s playing golf or tennis, or playing cards with friends, or visiting museums or sitting at the water’s edge. When’s the last time you played?

Spend time with friends, he also suggests. Way too often, when we’re overwhelmed, we find ourselves making excuses for why we can’t get together with friends. Schedule some time and do something with a friend. It will fill your soul and remind you of how precious your friends are to you and how precious you are to them!

Another thing Sweet recommends as a wonderful way to literally come away and rest is walking. Just go for a walk, and don’t immediately plug your ear with ear buds or headphones. Just walk and look at the gifts of creation with which God has surrounded you.

Well, Sweet has several more ideas, but I want to mention just one more – he calls it “moodling.” Moodling. In his words, “Moodling is a very simple name given to a very complex phenomenon. Perhaps it is better (he says) described than

defined: lying in the shade under a tree by a lake, watching the clouds go by; sitting in a hot tub, letting your thoughts flow; sleeping in a hammock under a harvest moon; riding horseback through a field; lollygagging on your walk home; marveling in a garden.” (Sweet, *The Jesus Prescription for a Happy Life*, p. 187)

Well, you get the idea. When I read that, it made me think of the way my father “moodled” on Sunday afternoons. Every Sunday afternoon, after coming home from church and having lunch, he would sit in his favorite chair for hours, devouring every word of the Sunday New York Times, sometimes accompanied in the background by the sound of a Phillies game over a transistor radio. That’s moodling!

Friends, Jesus is giving you permission to “moodle,” to come away and rest a while, to be renewed and restored, to step off the treadmill and out of the busyness of your life. He loved the disciples so much he encouraged them to do it, and he loves us so much as well.

So, I’m going to challenge you and challenge myself to do it this week. Do me a favor and take one of those cards out of the pew rack, and get something to write with. Got it? Okay, I want to challenge all of us to, this coming week, “come away and rest a while.” So, the first thing I want you to write down (and this is only for you to see, unless you choose to share it with someone else), is: one thing you will **not do** this week – for example, you might write “one evening I will shut down my computer or phone and not check it, or I will not add one thing to my calendar on an already busy day.” Well, you get the idea. Write down one thing you will not do this week.

Okay, now, write down one thing you **will do** this week, to “come away and rest a while.” It might be take a walk with or have lunch with a friend, play with your children or grandchildren, spend some time outside contemplating nature. Well, again, you get the idea. Write down one thing you will do to “come away and rest” this week.

I hope you’ll take this seriously, and I’d love to hear about it if you do, how it made you feel, how it helped you rest. So shoot me an email and let me know.

Dear friends, God calls us his beloved children, and he loves us more than we can possibly understand. He loves us and doesn’t want us to run on empty or find ourselves so weary and worn that we don’t experience joy. So “come away by yourself and rest for a while” that you may be rested, renewed and restored. May it be so.

Amen.