

“Every Moment for God”

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Sunday, July 19, 2015

The Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching

Scripture. Prayer.

Opening.

In 1960, expert testimony concerning time management was presented to a Senate subcommittee. The experts said that because of advances in technology, within twenty years or so, people would be radically cutting back on how many hours a week they worked, or how many weeks a year they worked, or else they would have to start retiring sooner. The great challenge, according to the experts of the sixties, was what people in our decade would do with all their free time!

I don't know about you, but I'm really struggling with all that free time I have... Can't think what to do with it all...

There once was a very busy man named Joe:

“[Joe's] young family was moving to a new house. On moving day, Joe announced that an important meeting had been called at his new job, and he would be unable to help.

Consequently, Jean had to handle the move by herself. After the moving van came and left, Jean found herself standing in the living room surrounded by boxes to be unpacked, appliances to be hooked up, a screaming baby and a five-year-old who decided to throw a metal toy truck through the picture window. Fortunately nobody was hurt, but jagged glass fell everywhere and a gale-force wind blew through the house.

“Jean felt that she had to call Joe and tell him what had happened. Joe's secretary informed her that he was in a meeting and couldn't be disturbed. ‘May I take a message?’ the secretary asked. ‘No, that's okay,’ Jean said, knowing Joe was notoriously lax about returning

her phone calls. ‘Wait,’ Jean said, ‘Just tell him the insurance will cover everything.’ The instant Joe got the message he called home.” (God’s Little Lessons on Life for Dad).

My husband, Roy, was a lot more help in our recent move than Joe was to his wife, Jean. But I’m going to file away Jean’s brilliant strategy in case I need it in the future: “Just tell him the insurance will cover everything.”

I. Finding God’s will for work and rest.

It’s good that Jean has a plan, but sad that Joe is so busy he thinks he can’t be there for his family in a time of need. Joe’s dilemma is one that many of us face – a choice between conflicting needs. Work or family? Church or children? Spouse or ailing parent? Friend or mission organization?

Jesus offers a different choice to his busy disciples: “Come away...and rest awhile.”

In our crazy-busy modern society: How do we find balance in our lives? Or, to put it another way: How do we find God’s will for work and rest in our lives?

Jesus suggests that we come away with him, that we make time for holy rest. Rest is holy when it is spent with God. God established the holiness of rest on that seventh day in the book of Genesis, when he declared that all he had created was “very good” (Gen. 1:31). “So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation” (Gen. 2:3).

In today’s gospel reading, the disciples are tired and overworked from their recent mission work. Jesus sent them out two by two to preach, teach, heal and cast out demons. Now Jesus says to his exhausted followers, “Come away to a deserted place by yourselves and rest a while” (v. 31).

Like Joe, we can often get so busy with work that we don’t take time to rest. This

includes church work. We can get so busy doing the Lord's work that we don't take time to just be with the Lord. Jesus invites his disciples to pause with him, to take time to eat together, to share more about their journeys and their work, to pray together and to reflect on the scriptures. Jesus invites his disciples to Bible study, prayer and Communion. Yes, he sends them out to do his work, to share his message with the world. He also expects them to stop for a moment now and then, to spend time with him.

So what does it mean to "come away" with Jesus? It can be as simple as pausing in our daily life to say a brief prayer. "Jesus are you there?" or "I give this day to you, Lord." In our busy lives, this may be all we have time for. And Jesus meets us in those brief moments of spiritual awareness. Such a small prayer can change a person's day in big ways. And if we can occasionally make the space to extend our prayer time, so much the better.

To "come away" with Jesus can also mean coming to church. Your decision to come to worship this morning is an answer to Jesus' call. He calls you to "come away." And today you have answered his call.

If you want to go deeper, you can "come away" with Jesus by making time for extended prayer; you can make time to read and study God's word. You can intentionally come away with Jesus – either by yourself or with a group of Christian friends.

Taking time to rest in Jesus is crucial to our spiritual health and wholeness. And it is crucial to our responsibilities as followers of Christ. Otherwise, as Karen Marie Yust comments: "We may become so caught up in the busyness of ministry that we forget to spend time with the One who would direct our preaching, teaching, healing, and justice-seeking endeavors."

There's a story about some African workers who were hired to carry heavy equipment on

their backs to a remote outpost. It was a place that couldn't be reached any other way but on foot. After several days of difficult travel, the workers refused to pick up their packs and go any further. They sat by the side of the trail ignoring the shouts of the leader of the expedition. Finally the leader asked why they wouldn't go on. One of the workers replied, 'Sir, we are waiting for our souls to catch up with our bodies.'" (Carla Gorrell).

Ever feel like you've left your soul far behind somewhere? Maybe it's time to pause for a bit. Engage in some holy rest. Come away with Jesus.

II. Compassion fatigue.

Rollo May once said, "It is an old and ironic habit of human beings to run faster when we have lost our way."

We run faster and faster, but so much of what busies us is shallow and meaningless. We long for more depth, more purpose.

Jesus says, "Come away...rest a while."

Of course, the disciples do just that. And then they are immediately interrupted by crowds of hungry people, and crowds of sick people...crowds of desperate people...sheep without a shepherd. Jesus says, "You feed them" (v. 37), and then he goes about miraculously feeding and healing everyone.

Jesus calls us to come away with him. But he also expects us to be ready to change directions on a dime if the kingdom requires it.

I will never forget a woman I heard preach years ago. I do not remember her name, or where we were, or even what year it was. I do remember her. I remember her English accent and her enthusiasm for her topic.

She was speaking on that great passage from Isaiah, "In the year that king Uzziah died I

saw...the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple” (Isa. 6:1).

I remember vividly what she said: “If you don’t feel compassion for others, get down on your knees before the throne of God and do not get up until you do!”

She understood that we are called to care for others, but that sometimes we don’t. And so we pray until the compassion of Christ becomes our compassion, too.

People in the helping professions have a name for that overworked, too tired place in which they sometimes find themselves. That place in which they can’t seem to find the energy to care about anyone anymore. They call this place “compassion fatigue.” It’s a place where people have been called on too often to care for others at the expense of their own need for a little rest and compassion for themselves.

No matter how we earn our paychecks, Christians are in the helping business. We, too, often suffer from “compassion fatigue.”

III. Deus Interruptus.

Jesus calls us out of our busyness, to come away with him and rest. Jesus, by his example, calls us to have compassion when our rest is interrupted or when our agenda is disrupted. How do we find balance amidst the demands of the world and the demands of the spiritual life?

If we were to live “every moment for God,” we might be able to find some peace. God is present in moments of work and in moments of rest – this knowledge can be reassuring when our work is interrupted by the needs of another person, or when our rest is interrupted by the needs of a hurting world.

Jean-Pierre de Caussade, an eighteenth-century spiritual director, comments on the ambiguity of coming away with Jesus to rest, and yet being interrupted in that rest by the hunger

of the crowds. How are we to find balance here? God calls us to retreat, to come away to spend time with him in spiritual renewal. At the same time, God calls us to serve others, to be ready to be interrupted when God calls us to serve.

De Caussade writes, “Everything turns to bread to nourish me, soap to wash me, fire to purify me, and a chisel to fashion me in the image of God. Grace supplies all my needs.”

When we trust in God to supply all our needs, then we are not thrown for a loop when someone interrupts our agenda for the day. Whether it be labors for God’s kingdom or holy rest initiated by Jesus, we trust that all of life is held in God’s hands. All of life has a purpose. Now we see in a mirror dimly, as the Apostle Paul writes. God sees clearly the arc of time and the span of our lives. We can trust in his eternal presence, breaking in to all the moments of our lives, bringing divine balance to our crazy-busy existence.

Closing.

Jerry Goebel’s offers a helpful concept -- “Deus Interruptus.” He writes:

“I have found that the higher my personal agenda, the less I am able to see God’s purpose in my daily ‘interruptions.’ Yet, I have also found that when make myself available to ‘Deus Interruptus,’ incredible and miraculous things frequently happen. Have you ever considered beginning your day by giving God permission to alter your agenda at any moment and any time?”

Goebel’s suggests that we pray this prayer each day:

“Dearest God, feel free to interrupt my agenda today with yours at anytime or in any place.”

May God give you balance between work and rest. May your work be meaningful and your rest be holy. And may you always have room for God’s interruptions.

Amen.