

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Intro

One of the things about the PANDEMIC that surprised people – it certainly surprised me – is how tired people are.

I don't mean tired as in tired of the pandemic and staying home, I mean physically tired.

- Who knew staying at home could be so tiring?

But it wasn't just staying at home, was it – life had to go on; St. Columba's had to go on – our mission and ministry had to go on.

- And so we had to step up and see that it did.

And so many of you did! With your pledges and extra gifts our carefully watched budget ended the year in the black and not in the dire straits we feared.

When we lost volunteers due to the virus, others of you stepped up to help – we found new ways of reaching out and connecting through Zoom and other methods for Book Studies, and meetings, and to keep our worshipping community together.

Yet, all that took a physical toll.

- We can only go to the well so many times.

- Our people are stretched thin – even to the breaking point – and I worry about asking people to take on “just one more thing.”

Then in today's Gospel reading Jesus says – “Slow down, REST a while;”

- and I want to say, “When, Lord? When?”

And yet, I don't think Jesus' advice could be better timed – for that's exactly what we need – if only we could find time to do it.

I. Come away

A. Our Gospel begins with the Disciples on the go.

1. As we heard a couple of weeks ago – Jesus sent them out to all the surrounding towns to bring the GOOD NEWS of God’s love.

2. Jesus had sent them to share his message, to heal the sick, and say that the Kingdom of God has come near.

3. Today, we read that the Disciples were taking this work to heart and were coming and going with reports of what they had done – and some of them didn’t even have time to eat before they were on the GO again.

4. Finally, Jesus tries to slow them all down before they burn out from all their exuberance and excitement.

5. He says, “It’s time for a break – let’s head off to a nice quiet place so you guys can have a rest.”

B. Jesus keeps doing this – taking time out to rest and pray.

1. Before Jesus begins his ministry – He spends 40 Days in the Wilderness to have time alone with God.

2. When he starts his work in Capernaum – after healing the sick and teaching the people – Peter and the Disciples are looking everywhere, trying to find him.

3. Finally, they find him in a deserted place PRAYING – and rather than returning to the scene of his big hit – he says, “It’s time to move on.”

4. Throughout the Gospel Jesus withdraws for PRAYER and time with God.

5. Even on the night before he died, Jesus withdraws again for PRAYER, this time to the Garden of Gethsemane and prays for the strength to do what he must do.

C. So, Jesus and the Disciples set out in their boat to go to a quiet place that they know.

1. But the crowd figures out what they are doing – and arrives there first.

2. So when Jesus steps out of the boat – rather than getting a rest – he is met by a mob of people demanding things of him.

3. And what does he do?

4. Does he say, “Hey, you guys beat it – come back tomorrow – I’m on my day off – I have a reservation for this place and it doesn’t include you.”

5. No, he has **compassion** on them and tries to respond to their needs because he sees them as “sheep without a shepherd.”

6. And in the part of the Gospel we will hear next week, he even goes so far as to FEED them with 5 loaves and 2 fishes.

7. Then, what does Jesus do, after he has sent the crowds on their way?

- He WITHDRAWS and PRAYS.

II. Jesus says to US “Come away”

A. Jesus says to US the very same thing he said to the Disciples – “Come away, rest and pray – spend some time with me.”

1. And oh, how like the Disciples we are!

2. We too are rushing to and fro – often doing the good work of the Kingdom and trying to be faithful to God’s call.

3. And we keep running on – trying to do more – adding, adding, adding – until it all comes tumbling down like a house of cards.

4. And as a result, we get burned out on God – and burned out on ministry – and Church becomes “that place where they only want me to do things” and we RESENT it.

5. We end up resenting God, and church, and the whole thing – and so do nothing.

6. How is that all important ministry being met then?

C. Or, we can heed Jesus’ voice.

1. We can hear his call to take time away, to spend time in prayer, and in turn be STRENGTHENED to do the work we need to do;

- to be empowered to take on a critical ministry or project at a difficult time.

2. It is said that **Martin Luther** would say, “I have a lot to do today and a particularly challenging issue – so I better spend twice as long on my prayers today.”

- According to google, the actual quote is, “I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.”

3. And we might want to follow this example as well.

III. Slowing Ourselves Down

A. Brian Zahnd, a non-denominational pastor in Saint Joseph, Missouri, writes this:

1. *“We have been seduced by an idolatry that deceives us in thinking that God is mostly found in the big and loud, when in fact, God is almost never found in the big and loud.”*

2. *“The ways of God are predominantly small and quiet.”*

3. *“The ways of God are about as loud as seed falling on the ground or bread rising in the oven.”*

4. *“The ways of God are almost never found in the shouts of the crowd; the ways of God are more often found in trickling tears and whispered prayers.*

5. *“We want God to do a big thing, while God is planning to do a small thing.*

6. *“We are impressed by big and loud. God is not.*

- *“We are in a hurry. God is not.*

- *“We want God to act fast, but Godspeed is almost always slow.*

7. He continues: *“So we are waiting for God to act, but I would suggest that we are not so much waiting for God to act **as we are waiting to become contemplative enough to discern what God is doing.**”*

8. *“God is always acting, because God is always loving his creation.*

9. *“The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are always inviting us into their house of love.*

10. *“But when we are consumed by anger, harried by anxiety, and driven by impatience, we are blind and deaf to what God is actually doing in the present moment.”*

B. The key in this for me is **“to become contemplative enough to discern what God is doing...”**

1. Slowing ourselves down enough to listen for God.

2. How can WE quiet ourselves to hear what God is calling us to do?

3. How can we “be still and know God” and what God is doing **in** us and **for** us?

4. Of course, one way is our various contemplative offerings: we can walk the Labyrinth, or attend our monthly Celtic Prayer, or Taize service

via Facebook as ways to slow down and open up so God can get inside our hearts and minds.

5. And then, once we have a time of rest, we, like Jesus, like the Disciples can be on the go again.

C. For we can rest for only so long.

1. Yes, Jesus withdrew to rest and pray – but he didn't stay there having his own personal mountain top experience with God.

2. His time of rest and prayer was to recharge that he might return to doing God's work reinvigorated and reenergized to bring God's love to the world.

3. And so must we.

4. Look how our Gospel reading ends; after his time of prayer, Jesus is back in the boat, arriving at new towns and villages, teaching and healing the people wherever he went.

5. We too are called to come away and rest and pray, that we may **“become contemplative enough to discern what God is doing...”** and then be reenergized to carry on God's work here and now.

6. Our work and ministry continues, in some ways more than before.

7. People still need to be fed and cared for – our worship life continues – now together – and other facets of our life together need our help as well as we work to build back our community stronger than ever, building, as our second reading says, “on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone.”

Conclusion

Let's work to heed Jesus' call to "Stop and come away" and spend some time in prayer with God.

Take advantage of our Contemplative Opportunities – those times of quiet and reflection when we can draw deeper into God.

Let us take some time to "rest and pray" that we may be all the more ready to step out to do the things God call us to do.

Let Us Pray

Almighty God, who pours out on all who desire it the spirit of grace and supplication: Deliver us, when we draw near to you, from coldness of heart and wanderings of mind, that with steadfast thoughts and kindled affections we may worship you in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

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