

Sermon: “Come and Rest”

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

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After an insanely busy and draining period of teaching, and healing—after Jesus and his disciples had given of themselves over and over again, day after day—Jesus tells his disciples, “come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” There are four different parts to this statement which mean something on their own. Come away; To a deserted place; All by yourselves; And rest a while. Goodness gracious, do we need to hear these words today. I think we need to slow down and hear the permission and the command to rest. It will be of no surprise to anyone that our world is a hectic place. With all the miracles of modern technology we are only a cell-phone’s *ding* away from whoever might think they need something. Or everyone’s *ding* of need. And, we make busy-ness a badge of honor. “How’s it going?”, “Pretty crazy! Pretty busy!” we answer. And that answer has an implicit message: I’m worthwhile because I’m busy.

Have you ever had a special place? I have. When I was a child I loved to play in one of the caves that were located on the side of the mountain that was not too far from my house. The cave entrance was covered by pine trees and the ground was covered with pine needles so that no grass or underbrush could grow there. The cave was my secret place where I raced my toy cars on private roads that big people could never see. I loved to make my way to this secret place.

It was the perfect place for a teenager to lay by the entrance of the cave, stare at the glimpses of sun peeking through the pine trees, and contemplate the meaning of life. When I was in Bethlehem a few weeks ago, I returned home and very shortly felt that urge to go to my secret place. I walked by the side of the mountain through the narrow path and came into the opening of the back field. As I looked across to where the pine trees were supposed to be, I was shocked to see that they were not there. I couldn’t believe it. Someone had cut the grove of pines. I felt sad.

Have you ever had a secret place like that? I think most people have. Maybe it was a particular place at the home where you grew up. Maybe it was a private place in your house. We all need a place where we can go and be alone. Jesus felt that need too. In our passage for today, we find that Jesus calls his disciples to go to a desert place. In fact, that term “desert place” is mentioned three times in just a few verses. The crowds had been pressing on Jesus and the disciples. The workload was heavy. And Jesus felt a need for a break. Unfortunately for Jesus and the disciples, the crowds followed him and interrupted his mini-vacation. Jesus took the interruption with grace and kindness that was characteristic of his life. This passage shows us the popularity of Jesus and the human need confronting him wherever he went. But we also find that theme of the

desert place, and we know that occasionally Jesus and the disciples did manage to get away from it.

I have always been fascinated by the number of times the Bible talks about wilderness and desert. Have you noticed that? Hagar, Moses, and Elijah go to the wilderness and find God. Moses was walking in the wilderness when he came upon a bush that was burning but not consumed. The children of Israel had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years before entering the Promised Land. John the Baptist went into wilderness to preach, and the crowds followed him there. When Jesus was tempted, he had gone into the wilderness for 40 days. And there we find Jesus and the disciples feeding the 5,000 in the wilderness. This “desert place” theme is a prominent one in the Bible.

Corrie ten Boom wrote a book about her experience during the Nazi Holocaust of World War II. She entitled her book *The Hiding Place* to describe her family’s efforts to hide Jews from the Nazis. The attic in her house was a refuge from the cruelty of the world. In the same way, we need a hiding place, not so much from the cruelty of the world but from the busyness of the world – a place of solitude, of rest, where distractions are minimized, so we can fix our focus on the larger picture through rest, reflection, and prayer.

Today, I want us to think about the need for a “desert place.” For me this represents our need for a spiritual break and a vacation for the soul. When Jesus took the disciples to a desert place, he was not just concerned about a vacation. He was concerned about the renewing of their souls. “Come and Rest”.

Wilderness and rest have nothing in common between them. A few weeks ago, when I was in a bus waiting to cross from Jordan to Jericho, I looked outside the window of the bus to the wilderness of Jericho. Under the heat of the sun, I saw hills and mounds that are barren and lifeless. They stretch for miles and miles into an open space. No trees, shade, or water but swirling mounds and twisting hills that are dry, hot, barren, bleak, unwelcoming, desolate, uninviting, empty, and lonely.

The wilderness is a place without resources. But it is also the place where Yahweh is present with and to his people. Listen to the word of God in the book of Deuteronomy: “He knows you’re going through this great wilderness; these forty years the Lord your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing” (Deut. 2:7). The wilderness should have been a place of death, but life is given. The wilderness should have been a place of weariness, sickness, poverty, and disease, but people are sustained and kept well. Because Yahweh is present, nothing is lacking. In the wilderness, God provides (Gen. 22:14). Also, when God safely led the Israelites through Sinai into Canaan, Isaiah tells us “the spirit of the Lord gave them rest” (Isaiah 63: 14). Again,

Jeremiah uses the Exodus narrative when Israel survived the sword and “found grace in the wilderness; when [they] sought for rest,” (Jeremiah 31: 2).

Jesus and the wilderness belong to each other. In the wilderness, people want to hear fresh words from the mouth of Jesus. His presence transforms. “Come and Rest”. Rest in the wilderness is the ultimate intention of God to his people. The multitude that followed Jesus, they experienced the compassion of Jesus; they become the people of the new exodus.

Jesus is the one whose yoke is easy. His burden is light. And he is the embodiment of refreshment in the Presence of God. Jesus is inviting us to turn to the desert place of our spirits. In the desert place we long to hear fresh words from the mouth of Jesus and find rest.

An anonymous author wrote this poem about taking time for God:

Take time to think;
it is the source of power.
Take time to read;
it is the foundation of wisdom.
Take time to play;
it is the secret of staying young.
Take time to be quiet;
it is the opportunity to seek God.
Take time to be aware;
it is the opportunity to help others.
Take time to love and be loved;
it is God's greatest gift.
Take time to laugh;
it is the music of the soul.
Take time to be friendly;
it is the road to happiness.
Take time to dream;
it is what the future is made of.
Take time to pray;
it is the greatest power on earth.

Let us all take time to hear Jesus’ voice in the wilderness.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.