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July 22, 2018
Proper 11 B
Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

The disciples had come back to tell Jesus about all they had done and taught. Imagine that debrief session post mission trip discussion. Andrew and Peter, James and John, Philip and Thomas, Matthew and the other James, Thaddeus and Simon, Judas and Bartholomew were all sitting around Jesus recounting the highs and lows of their ministry thus far. “Oh Jesus let me tell you about this family we talked to about God,” and “Jesus I healed this leper, it was amazing,” not to forget “Lord you wouldn’t believe how they treated me in Bethsaida, or Capernum, or Tiberius.” The telling and retelling of our mission and ministry stories is an important part of who we are; it forms our fellowship as disciples, it helps us weave a common narrative. Whether we are priests healing in the name of Jesus by anointing and using oils like the disciples, teachers exploring Bible stories to the youngest amongst us in Godly Play or in Benque Viejo Belize,

cooks serving the food insecure on Fridays at our community meal, or companions visiting a homebound member to provide much needed socialization, when we share our stories we demonstrate how the love of God is active in all our lives, but we also get the opportunity to celebrate the Good News that we share with the world.

But sometimes it all becomes too much, and we have a little bit of an echo chamber. It can be a bit like the youngest child, Stewie Griffin, in the satirical cartoon comedy “Family Guy” who tries to get the attention of his mother, Lois, while she is exhausted and lying in bed. He tries to get his mother’s attention by saying “Mom, mom, mom; mommy, mommy, mommy; momma momma momma, ma, ma, ma, Mum, mum mum...” You get the picture.

I imagine that while the disciples are going through their debrief Jesus may have been feeling a bit like Lois. The disciples are all trying to say how great they were at what he was sending them out to do. But he knew firsthand what it felt like to teach and heal and be judged for fulfilling the teachings of God.

He was the Son of God and he had been doing this for a while now; however, all this was new to them.

Being infinitely more patient and understanding of their experiences, Jesus, instead of shouting “What?!?!” which is what Lois (and to be honest I as a mother of two would do), invites them to come with him for some time apart, a trip to a deserted place to rest a while.

Now at this point in today’s gospel it would seem like they packed their bags for a seaside jaunt and just went right into a restful sabbath time. However, in the 20 verses between 34 and 53 some pretty intense events in Jesus’ earthly ministry occurred—namely the feeding of the 5,000 and walking on water. Which I think is important to at least note (and we will come back to talk about those events in the coming weeks and months before Advent starts), that even though Jesus tried to take the disciples to a deserted place to pray, it wasn’t quite as easy for them to accomplish as it appears in today’s lectionary selection.

Let’s think about this for a minute, though—the disciples are on fire. The Holy Spirit is working double time with them, they are healing people and

teaching and doing all these things. They are doing what needs to be done. They have come together to share best practices, the highs and lows of ministry with one another. They are out doing the work and Jesus says to them, let’s take a break.

Let’s take a break? Seriously Jesus, there is so much work to be done, there are people to be healed and fed and taught. You’ve given us so much to do—God, why would you want us to stop now?

The answer is that if we don’t stop, we forget that it isn’t our own will, but God’s will that is being done through us.

The answer is that if we don’t stop, we think that what we are doing is because we are powerful, and we are smart, and we are doing all these things ourselves.

The answer is that if we don’t stop, we forget that we are God’s and it is only through God’s will that we are able to have anything.

So stop. All of us, just stop. Make the plan to stop. Make the effort to go to the deserted place to

reconnect to God. The God who created us, the God who became us, the God who empowers us, calls us to stop. To stop like God did, on the seventh day God rested and said it was Good.

Come on we all know rest is Good—say it with me: “Rest is Good.” I can quote studies about the importance of sleep and recreation and meditation and prayer, but I am not going to do that. Instead I am going to ask you do something different. Think about the past seven days, between last Sunday and this Sunday, when have you worked, when have you played, when have you rested, when have you prayed?

Consider how we spent our time this week.

Imagine that we are sitting there with Jesus and the disciples debriefing our experiences.

What is the thing that you spent the most time doing this week?

What are you most proud of?

What are you most annoyed by?

If you are anything like me—most of my week was spent at work. After being away the week before, I had a pile of emails, phone calls to return, meetings to attend, conversations which had to happen and we are in the season of planning so I continued getting my act together for Back to School and Advent. I felt pretty good about myself as I sat down to write this sermon thinking about all I had accomplished, until I realized how much was still left to be done.

The rest of my week is spent working at home. The laundry still has to be done (that’s a never ending battle). Dinner has to be made, the kids need baths, the dog needs a walk, the dishes need to be put away.

By the end of the day I am exhausted. Andrew and I usually plop on the couch and look at one another kind of bleary eyed and ask “Is 8:45 too late to start a show on Netflix?”

Prayer is present in my daily life and I have the vocational benefit of being paid to pray—but prayer in the week often looks like grace at meals, daily morning prayer in the car, bedtime prayers with the

kiddos all of which are affirmations of faith, opportunities for thanksgiving, moments of grace.

But the rest part—the rest part even after a vacation, even after years of being told that Sabbath is an important aspect of a healthy and mature life of faith, even after being lectured by Bishops and Spiritual Directors, rest is something I'm not great at. Sleep I can do. Rest I am a miserable failure at.

And this is exactly what Jesus wants the disciples to learn in today's Gospel, it is important to work, it is important to fellowship, it is important to give thanks and praise but it is also important to sit down and stop.

Stop talking, stop doing, stop running, stop scheduling, stop coordinating, stop, stop, stop.

As they say over the pond: Full Stop.

Sabbath is simply taking time to refocus our energy and purpose and intention on God.

We all need sabbath time. We all need to catch our breath and remind ourselves that we are God's creation, that we are God's ministers in the world, and that nothing we do is independent of God.

As Jesus was keen to remind those who chose to follow him, the Sabbath was made for people not people for the Sabbath.

God set an example for us in the very act of creation to have a time of reflection, of rest and renewal.

That doesn't mean that things won't get in the way, but it is possible to have a very healthy relationship with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit by finding moments of rest in the hectic-ness of our lives. Not everyone can get to that deserted place that Jesus talks about, and honestly the disciples and Jesus didn't get there without interruption and their interruptions were pretty impressive when compared with my pile of laundry and my never empty inbox.

But notice that when Jesus said let us go away, none of his disciples said, no Jesus let us stay here, let us revel in the good we are doing, let us just work one

more day. Let us stay here for another season. I'll take a break next year or next month or maybe tomorrow. No the disciples went ahead of him to prepare the boat so that they could go and rest and be fed. They were able to say—Yes, Lord, you are right, we need a break.

In the face of the million reasons why we should keep working, there is one reason to stop, and that reason is that God stopped.

If it's good enough for the creator of the world. It's good enough for you, because no matter how meaningful, how good, how fruitful our work is, it is not creation. Give thanks to the Lord our God for the gift of sabbath, give thanks and observe it. Make time to go to a deserted place, and don't beat yourself up about it if hurdles fall on your path, continue on until you get there and when you find yourself resting in God's almighty hand, just stop.

And Be.

Amen