

July 21, 2024 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

Go to Jesus for Rest!

You've got a week off of work after some very stressful days. Your friend offers you his cabin "up north." On the first day of your vacation at the cabin, you sleep in a bit. You enjoy a breakfast on the patio with a gentle breeze to keep the mosquitoes away. It's calm. It's peaceful. The birds are praising God with their chirping. You refill your cup of coffee, lean back in your chair and exhale deeply. It is the ideal get-away. Then your phone rings and you can see that it is from work. Do you answer it?

Jesus and his disciples needed a little time away. In last Sunday's gospel lesson, Jesus sent them out to preach, teach and drive out demons. Now they came back and were excited to share their stories, just like seniors at the Seminary love telling stories about their vicar years. But the disciples kept getting interrupted by all the people who were coming to see Jesus. They were so busy that they did not even have time to take a lunch break. The disciples and Jesus were tired. He suggested they get away for a little rest. They got in a boat and started sailing across the Sea of Galilee. It probably took a couple of hours of sailing. If you've ever been on a sailboat, there is something incredibly peaceful about gliding over the water without the sound of an engine. What a restful trip they had.

The people in Galilee saw that Jesus was headed across the lake. So they quickly ran along the shore to get where Jesus was going before he got there. Along the way, they told others about Jesus who joined them. By the time Jesus arrived at his destination, there was a huge crowd of thousands waiting for him. I'm sure the disciples groaned like you would if you got a call from work while on vacation. Mark tells us, though, that Jesus had "**compassion**" on them. This is a powerful word. It means that his stomach was churning. He nearly felt sick because he felt so bad for those people in such need.

Like the disciples, my heart is not always moved with compassion when I hear about someone who needs help. I'm guessing the same for you. Yes, we want to help people, but especially when we're tired and people ask us for help, our common reaction is to groan. "Now what?" How wonderful to know that Jesus never feels that way. When he looks at you, he also has "**compassion**." His heart goes out to you. He wants to help. When you confess your sins, he does not say, "Again? I forgave that sin last week." He is

always eager to help. He hears every prayer. Through his Word, he forgives and comforts. In the Lord's Supper, he touches you personally with the proof of his loving forgiveness. What a blessing to know that Jesus has a heart that is concerned for you as an individual!

Mark tells us that Jesus had compassion on the people because "**they were like sheep without a shepherd**." Sheep without a shepherd are doomed to die. This was serious. The Lord had appointed shepherds – spiritual leaders – for his people, but they failed. The religious leaders – the priests, scribes, elders, etc. – were supposed to point the people to the promised Messiah who was coming to take away their sins. Instead, they brow beat the people, "You should be more holy like we are. Stop sinning, or you'll burn in hell." The people were crushed. They knew they were not holy. They knew that they did not measure up to God's standard of perfection and could not no matter how hard they tried. They were trapped with their sin and guilt. They were looking for hope in a hopeless world. They were weary, tired.

Guilt also assaults us. The devil is constantly whispering in your ear, "You're guilty. How could a real Christian do, say and think the things you have? How can you expect God to love you and let you into heaven?" That leaves us feeling restless. Then there's the burden of daily living in a sin-infected world. Our world surrounds us with news available at our fingertips, and most of the news is not good. This is a world out of touch with people and, most tragically of all, out of touch with God. We all struggle with different issues. The daily grind of work, meals, laundry can wear us out. Our bodies are weakening and we all face the inevitability of our own death. Some have a gaping hole in their hearts because someone they loved has died. Others wait for medical reports with uncertain outcomes. Still others are heartsick with worry over others. Some are torn apart with difficult decisions they need to make. It seems that all we can do is grin and bear it and our grins can get pretty fake. It's easy to feel weary and tired, not just physically and emotionally, but spiritually. God, are you there? We're restless.

When Jesus looked at the crowd of thousands, he saw hurting hearts, people who were tired of dealing with the struggles of a sin-infected world, people who were burdened with guilt, people who were not sure of God's love or heaven. They were restless. Jesus had compassion on them. They were sheep without a shepherd, so Jesus stepped up and was a shepherd to them. He did not tell the people, "Go away. It's my vacation. I've earned a rest." No. He gave up his rest to give them rest. He laid down his life for the sheep. Think of the night he was arrested. Most people had a good night's sleep. He was

up all night long as he was abused and falsely accused. He needed rest, but was dragged in front of Pilate, who gave the order for his back to be shredded to strips of flesh with a whip. Jesus especially needed rest then, but Pilate gave the order for him to be crucified. He struggled under the weight of his own cross. He felt the spikes go through his flesh as they lifted him up and his weight pulled down against the spikes. Each breath was a painful struggle. He needed rest, but even God turned his back on him. God turned his back on Jesus so that he could turn a smiling face to you and look on you with favor. As Jesus died on the cross, he took away every reason God had for being angry with you. Your sins are forgiven. Jesus had compassion on the whole world, including you. You do not need to be afraid of God. He is smiling on you. No matter what your fear, no matter what your guilt, no matter what your private pain, Jesus will help you through it day by day. He constantly encourages you with the sure and certain hope of enjoying perfect rest in heaven. When you are weary and need rest, go to Jesus.

The Hebrew word for rest is “sabbath.” In the 3rd Commandment, the Lord tells us to “Remember the Sabbath day.” In the Old Testament, that referred to a specific day of the week. Now, it refers to any time you spend with God’s Word. Mark tells us that “[Jesus] **began to teach them many things.**” God’s Word gave them the rest they need. I can only imagine how he pointed to God’s constant love for his people throughout their nation’s history. No matter how badly they sinned and no matter how often, God did not – he could not – give up on them. He controlled world history until everything was lined up properly and Jesus was born. The promised Messiah would take away the sin of the world. They did not need to feel crushed or scared or hurting or guilty or doubting God’s love for them. They could smile and rejoice that salvation was gift that God offered them for free.

I’m going to guess that the disciples groaned when they saw the crowd and realized they were not going to get the vacation they hoped for. It is important to get some rest for your body. And I’m not going to tell you if you should answer a phone call from work if you’re on vacation. But Jesus taught the disciples and us that the greatest, most important, rest comes from the good news of salvation. Nothing can compare to being God’s forgiven child who is headed for heaven. So, whether you are on vacation or not, do what that crowd did by the Sea of Galilee. They rushed to spend time with Jesus. Come to church. Set aside time for devotions in your home. Pray and pray and pray. Listen to Christian music. Even if you don’t feel like it, especially when you don’t feel like it, spend time with God’s Word. When guilt nags at you and life gets tough, go to Jesus for rest and be saved. Amen.