



# “Jesus and Self-Care”

Text: Mark 6:30-34, 53,-56

*a sermon by the Rev. Anna von Winckler*

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - EVANSVILLE, INDIANA

Is it just me or do you also feel like our world is spinning faster and faster with every passing year? And that our lives just seem to get busier and busier? We have creature comforts to make our lives easier like dishwashers and washing machines, microwaves, and air fryers, which I use a lot; we have cars and computers and cell phones. They were invented to make our lives easier, and so we should have more time than our grandparents and great grandparents and yet it seems we have less free time than ever before.

In today’s reading from Mark the apostles have just returned from their first mission trip. And they are excited. They “gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught.” They were healing the sick, and casting out unclean spirits, and proclaiming the gospel. And they were ready to do more, to build on their success. But Jesus responded to their enthusiasm with this invitation to “come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while. And “Jesus knew that the rest was the most important thing that is disciples needed now. They had done important work, but now it was time to rest.

I don’t think that this rest is simply physical rest. I think Jesus is offering them spiritual rest, rest for their souls. Jesus is inviting his disciples to do what he did regularly. Back in chapter 1 of Mark’s gospel we have a great example of this. Jesus is in Capernium, and the “whole city was gathered around the door” of the house where he was staying. And Jesus “cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.” Everything was going well, and his ministry and influence was growing.

But what did he do? “In the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.” Jesus followed up his healing and teaching by resting in prayer. Not by sleeping. He actually had to give up a little sleep, and leave while it was still dark so that no one would stop him. But he did this, and he went to this deserted place to pray and get some needed spiritual rest. some rest for his soul.

When we think of rest, we usually think of rest for our bodies. But when Jesus thinks of rest, he is talking about rest for our souls. And these are very different. Of course, in this fast-paced world of ours, we often forget to do either of these, don't we?

Studies have shown that we Americans currently average 6.8 hours of sleep a day, which is down more than an hour from what it was in the 1940s. There are many studies these days that show that getting 7 to 9 hours of sleep a night is important for most of us. But many of us are not getting that kind of physical rest. And our physical health is affected by that.

But what about spiritual rest? Are we getting enough of that? And what happens when we don't get enough rest for our souls? When we don't spend enough time in prayer? We don't spend enough time in worship? When we don't spend enough time with God's word? I think it is similar to what happens when we don't get enough sleep. Our souls become vulnerable to disease.

We might become, for example, more and more frustrated and burned out, even if we are doing good things. We might forget why we are doing those good things. We might forget to rely on God when we are doing those things. We forget that it is really not about us, it's about God.

I think that is why Jesus is encouraging his disciples to get away and rest a while, after they have returned from their mission trip. Come away to a deserted place, Jesus says - perhaps even the same deserted place where he prayed - and rest awhile.

But I have to wonder what his disciples thought about that. Did they wonder if this was really the best idea? Shouldn't they capitalize on the success of that mission trip, and keep spreading the gospel? Keep healing the sick, casting out demons, and doing the work of bringing God's kingdom to earth? But no, Jesus knew that the work of ministry needs to be followed by rest. By spending time with God and prayer.

And isn't that the case in our world now? Doesn't our work need to be balanced by rest? And especially by resting in God, isn't that what it means to "remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy"? Aren't we simply doing what God modeled for us and Genesis, when after creating our world, the Lord rested? And aren't we simply doing what Jesus modeled for us in Mark chapter 1, when he got up while it was still dark and went to a deserted place to pray?

There is a book called *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*. And in this book, the author shares the story of how the book got its name. It was from another Christian writer, Dallas Willard, who said that "hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day." If you want to be the person that God is calling you to be, Dallas Willard said that "you must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life. Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day". Or as Corrie ten Boom put it, "if the devil can't make you sin, he'll make you busy". Busy is good enough to the devil, because it doesn't leave any time to worship or pray or rest in God. There is a quote that says "if you are too busy to worship, you are far busier than God intended you to be." God intends for us to spend time in worship, and in prayer. We need the spiritual rest, just as we need physical rest.

But it is also good to remember that we don't worship, pray, and rest in God simply to rest. The spiritual rest also equips us to continue doing the work to which we are called. It helps us to proclaim the gospel, and serve people following the example of Jesus, and strive for justice and peace. Spiritual rest helps our spiritual work, just as physical rest helps our physical work.

After Jesus spent time in the deserted place praying, he got up and got back to the mission. Spiritual rest leads to spiritual work, to serving and loving and proclaiming and striving for justice and peace.

In today's gospel reading, the deserted place that Jesus took the disciples to did not stay deserted for long. "Many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns." So, what did Jesus do? Did he tell the crowds to leave, or did he go with his disciples to find a new and more deserted place? No, when he saw the crowd, Jesus "had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and they began to teach them many things." The rest led to their next mission.

Which might raise the question of which is more important, or which should be done next? Rest, or work? And I love the answer I once came across, using the analogy of breathing. Which is more important, breathing in or breathing out? It all depends on which one you did last!

If you have been spending lots of time doing ministry, then it is probably more important to take time to go to a deserted place, or at least a relatively quiet and solitary place, and rest a while and God's presence. On the other hand, if you have been spending time in prayer and worship, resting in God's presence, then it is probably more important now for you to do ministry. Which is more important depends on which you've been doing more of lately. There is rhythm to the Christian life, that Jesus himself models for us, and that today's gospel reading illustrates very well.

Of course, if I am going to talk about spiritual rest, I can't help but share this verse from Matthew 11, when Jesus says: come to me, all you that are weary, and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Rest for our weary souls is what Jesus offers to us all. And we all need that rest. We all carry heavy burdens at times. We all find ourselves weary at times. Ministering in Jesus' name can take a lot of physical, emotional, and spiritual energy. If this is one of those times for you when you find yourself weary for whatever the reason might be, then hear Jesus' words today and come to him. Cast your burdens at his feet. And trust him with what is troubling you. Come to him, all who are weary in your souls, who are carrying heavy burdens, and find rest for your souls.

And then, of course, go. Go and be his hands, his feet, his ears, and his voice. Go in Jesus' name to feed the hungry and care for the sick, to comfort the despairing, and share the good news of God's love for us all.

Come, and then go. Breathe in, and breathe out. Worship and pray, then love serve and proclaim. Both are important to the Christian life. Both are commanded by Jesus himself. And which is more important simply depends on which you did last. All you who are weary come to Jesus, and find rest for your souls. And may all you who are rested, go out into the world to continue his mission on this earth. To the Glory of God. Amen.

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