

Sermon for July 21, 2024 – Pentecost 9

Mark 6:30-34 EHV

**Theme: Our Compassionate Shepherd offers us rest.**

- 1) Rest from the world.
- 2) Rest for the world.

*<sup>30</sup>The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup>He said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.” For there were so many people coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat. <sup>32</sup>They went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. <sup>33</sup>But many people saw them leave and knew where they were going. They ran there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. <sup>34</sup>When Jesus stepped out of the boat, he saw a large crowd. His heart went out to them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He began to teach them many things.*

This Christian woman certainly loved her Saviour – so much so that she spent countless hours working at church in the background, taking care of her family at home, and doing what she could to glorify Christ among her friends. To say she was busy was an understatement, but she didn't care. It was all for her Saviour.

But after some time, life's petty problems began to wear on her. Certain church members complained about her volunteer work - not appreciating how much time and effort she put into it. She kept busy; yet the joy she once had in all she did seemed to slip away, and she began to wonder why she kept on doing all the things she did.

Have you ever felt like this woman – so overwhelmed with busyness that you seemed to forget why you were doing the things you do? If so, you are not alone. Yes, the devil knows how busyness can rob us of our joy, peace, and purpose in Christ. That is why he loves overwhelming our lives with busyness – even using our good works to try to separate us from Christ.

Because Jesus knows that to be the case, he is constantly urging us to find rest in him. Let us meditate on today's Gospel lesson to consider why, under the theme: **Our Compassionate Shepherd offers us rest.** 1) Rest from the world. 2) Rest for the world.

Part One: Rest from the world.

Shortly before our sermon text, the evangelist Mark wrote about how Jesus sent his twelve apostles to preach the Gospel in the surrounding towns and villages. This seemed to be the first time Jesus sent them on a mission journey without him. We don't exactly know how long they were gone,

but when the time had come for them to return; <sup>30</sup>*The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all that they had done and taught.*

And they had a lot to discuss with Jesus. On the one hand, they experienced the power of God's Word in calling people to faith. Demons fled and hardened hearts melted in repentance at their preaching. They experienced the joy the Gospel brought others as they heralded the arrival of God's kingdom through Christ. But their short ministry wasn't all a bed of roses. Because Jesus warned them about rejection, we can assume that some people met their message with unbelief<sup>i</sup>. Moreover, there was the tragic news that Herod beheaded John the Baptist<sup>ii</sup> while they were off on their journey. Jesus and the disciples had a lot to discuss, but with *so many people coming and going ... they did not even have a chance to eat.*

Jesus realized that the situation was not good. Even though the crowds wanted to see him, the disciples needed rest and alone time with Jesus to process their experiences and be renewed for future ministry.

So <sup>31</sup>*He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while." ...* <sup>32</sup>*They went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.*

There is nothing quite like sailing on a lake: the flapping of the sail in the wind and the lapping of waves against the boat... it's all truly relaxing. More important, however, was the person with whom the disciples were sailing: their Saviour from sin. Jesus not only invited the disciples to come with him for physical rest but spiritual rest as well as he listened to their thoughts and taught God's promises to them, undistracted by the world around them.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, when overwhelmed with busyness, we don't always recognize our need for spiritual rest with Jesus away from the world. So many things come at us in life so fast that we hardly have time to process them in the light of God's Word. Our souls get tired. For that reason, we need to heed Jesus' invitation: *"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."*<sup>iii</sup>

Just as Jesus invited the disciples to come away with him to a secluded place for rest, so he invites us. Therefore, make every effort to set aside a little time, away from the world's distractions, to meet with your LORD in prayer and meditate on his Word. Like the disciples, tell Jesus everything that is on your mind: your joys and sorrows, triumphs and trials. Express to him your physical, spiritual, and emotional concerns for those God placed in your life. Confess your sins and admit your doubts to God - especially the ones that fill you with such shame that you hate to think about them. Yes, *"Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you."*<sup>iv</sup>

And once you have done that, remember Jesus' empty cross and what it means for you. Jesus loved you so much that he took all your guilt, sins and shame with him to the cross and died for them all. He rose from the dead to prove their forgiveness. Not only that, but he promises to hear your prayers, comfort you with his promises, and send you the Holy Spirit to guide, protect, comfort and counsel you through life. Yes, it's in this Gospel message of God's undeserved, forgiving love for you that you find rest for your soul. Not only that, but you also find redirection and instruction

on what is truly important in life. You find reassurance that God will keep all the promises he made with you in Christ: that, as you cling to Jesus in faith and love, you can be sure that he will work in all things for your good.<sup>v</sup>

God certainly offers us amazing rest through his Gospel – spiritual rest we desperately need to reinvigorate our purpose and joy in living to his glory. The disciples understood it, which is why they went with him in the boat. But they weren't the only ones desiring the rest Jesus offered. The crowds wanted to have it too - so much so that when *many people saw them leave and knew where they were going. They ran there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them.*

Can you picture the scene? A boat in the distance with the disciples, getting some needed downtime, and a crowd of people running ahead, wanting to meet the man who offers them hope unlike any other. Unlike their teachers of the law, Jesus spoke of God's unearned forgiveness — offered to all and received through repentance and faith. Not only that, but he had the power to help, heal, and restore. Is it any wonder the crowd spared no time or effort to run to Jesus?

How about you? Do you run to him – trusting that he has the power to heal, help, and restore you? Are you willing to drop everything to spend a little time with him? If we are honest with ourselves, we are not always willing to do so. Why? Sometimes it's because worldly things have enamoured our hearts to such a degree that we desire them more than time with Jesus. Other times, however, I think it's because we let the busyness of serving God distract us from meditating on what God does for us in Christ. We become so focused on what we want to do for him that we forget to concentrate on what God has done for us and why we want to do what we can to share His saving love with those around us.

## Part Two: Rest for the world.

And here is where there is an interesting twist in the story. Jesus didn't just want to give his disciples rest from the world for their benefit. No, he did so that they might understand the purpose behind all their busyness in ministry.

We read: <sup>34</sup>*When Jesus stepped out of the boat, he saw a large crowd. His heart went out to them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He began to teach them many things.*

Isn't that amazing? The original reason Jesus came to that place was to be away from the crowd for rest. But, instead of being annoyed by the crowd, he was filled with compassion. Why? Because he saw the pain and anxiety they felt over their worldly problems, and how they couldn't find genuine relief. More importantly, just as sheep without a shepherd are unprotected and in danger, so all those people were in danger of dying in the devil's clutches, apart from Jesus. Deep, gut-wrenching compassion moved Jesus to minister to the crowd and not withhold the Gospel from them.

Yes, our compassionate Saviour not only offered his disciples rest from the world, but he also gave them the rest the world needs. One of the biggest reasons Jesus called them from their busyness was to reinvigorate them for it. You see, it is easy for people busy with churchwork to get so lost

in the details and busyness of what they are trying to accomplish that they lose sight of why they are doing the things we do. Instead of joyfully serving others in love, we may begin to view our tasks as mere “work” – things we need to get done.

Whenever ministry becomes a job instead of being driven by compassion, we are missing the point of what our ministry is about. Love and compassion for people and the desire to put their souls at rest with the Gospel are the only proper driving forces of our ministry. The devil is good at using the busyness of ministry to get us to forget the compassion Christ wants us to have for those around us. That is why Jesus not only gave the disciples rest from the world on the boat ride to a secluded place, but also modelled what proper compassion looks like in offering his rest to the crowd that gathered there.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, look at the people God places in your life and see them as Christ saw the crowd. Without Jesus, they are harassed and helpless - going through life without genuine hope and in danger of dying apart from Christ. Jesus wants you to share in his compassion for them and work hard to show them the same love he showed you. Don't be afraid to be busy for Christ - letting your words and actions share Christ's saving love with them.

But in your busyness for Christ, don't forget to heed his invitation to come to him frequently for rest for your soul, away from the world. Why? Because he cares for you as much as he cares for others. He wants to apply to you the peace and freedom his work has won for you; for it is only after receiving his grace, mercy, and peace for yourself that you can compassionately share it with others to the glory of His name. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Cf. Mark 6:11

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. Matthew 14:10-12

<sup>iii</sup> Matthew 11:28-29 EHV

<sup>iv</sup> 1 Peter 5:7 (EHV)

<sup>v</sup> Cf. Romans 8:28