

Stop and Rest
July 19, 2009
Mark 6:30 – 34; 53 – 56

³⁰The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

³²So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.

³⁴When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

⁵³When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. ⁵⁴As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. ⁵⁵They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.

This is the Word of God and It can be trusted.

Thanks be to God.

"Stop and Rest" is a sermon interpretation of Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56 with an emphasis on verses 30 – 32. There are signs and areas along every major freeway for travelers to rest and stretch their legs. Let these signs be a metaphor, a reminder that every individual needs to stop and rest awhile, a time away from the stresses and hurried routines of our lives.

Jesus said, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." Many of us look forward to summer. It is time when vacations are planned; you may go to your cabins or Lake Homes. The heat drives others to the beaches, some to the mountains and those, like me, into anywhere with air conditioning! Summer is a time for getting away, a time for renewal, resting, recreating and recreation.

Let's take a few moments this morning to pick apart verses 30 – 32 and see what Jesus has to teach us in the way of acknowledging the world around us and in accepting that we all need time for rest. Before we do so, let us pray that God will direct, guide and prepare us for the lesson today. Let us Pray.

Dear Heavenly Father, teach us how to truly stop and rest from our labors. Help us to cease striving. In You Father, there is peace and there is quietness for our soul. We long to be still enough to hear Your quiet Spirit whisper gentleness to us. Restore our soul, made weary from the expectations of the world. Refresh our spirit with the kindness of your Word.

We surrender to you all of our worries and work. We sacrifice to you our need for control and ask you to take over our lives and to lead us beside still waters. We praise you, and we love you, God of Rest, for in you alone we are justified and not by the works of our own hand.

Open our ears that we may hear and our minds that we may learn Your word for us today. In Christ wonderful and Holy name we pray. Amen!

³⁰The apostles

Here for the first time in Mark's gospel, we hear the disciples referred to as apostles. Is there a difference? The words are often used interchangeably, but they don't quite mean the same thing. All Christians should, at the very least, be Disciples of Christ, because they follow his teachings. (*Disciple* comes from the Latin *discipulus*, which means "pupil.") Few Christians, however, have ever been full-on apostles, because "apostle" is a title describes one who has been sent. The 12 disciples officially became Jesus' delegates when he personally sent them out into the world to preach and heal. More simply stated; disciples are called; apostles are sent.

The apostles of our scripture reading today were the eyewitnesses of Jesus, those who associated with Jesus in the flesh, those people who were called as the original twelve disciples. Here we read that the twelve disciples had been sent out on their first missionary journey. Likewise, many Christians today are apostolic people. We are often sent out into the world around us. Even with all of the advancements of modern technology, we still must leave our homes sometime. Whether to go to work, to school, to run errands, to

purchase the necessities of life or simply to interact with one another; we are out there in the world. We don't live in isolation; we live in a great big world of interaction. We are not called to remain in our homes or our churches but we are sent into our communities; our places of business or our schools with the message and power of the gospel.

Share the love of Christ through a smile, a friendly hello or a word of encouragement. I used to say, and still believe, that every woman should be told daily that they are beautiful. It's part of who they are and what they need. Likewise, everyone needs to hear that they are doing a good job and that they are appreciated. The next time you out and about, tell some the receptionist at the desk or the person who talks your call not only "thank you" but also, "I appreciate you." We are not sent into the world to ignore, but to encourage it, to help mend its wounds and to ease its pain and suffering.

Gathered around Jesus

Followers of Christ always gather around Jesus. Jesus is the center, the focus, the core, the axis, the hub of the Christian church. We always gather around Jesus. Jesus is our center.

You may have heard me at some time refer to what I like to call "shopping list" Christians. That is, those who preach that Jesus should be your first priority, then your family second, your career, third, etc. I personally don't subscribe to that ideology. "What? You mean to say Pastor that that you don't believe that Jesus should be first in your life?" That is exactly what I am saying, but here me out. If you place your priorities on list, then it becomes tempting to just check them off. I don't like the idea of getting up in the morning, talking to God for a few minutes while brushing my teeth and then checking Him off as if He has no place in the remainder of my day.

Like the apostles of our reading, we should find ourselves forever gathered around Jesus, placing him at the center of our lives, not at the top of some list. If we place Jesus

at the center of our lives, then everything else can be placed equally around Him, placing emphasis on His role in our lives.

And reported to him all they had done and taught.

It is almost as if the first disciples were like children, wanting to come back and report to their master what they had done and taught. They wanted to share with Jesus what had happened. We enjoy sharing good news with people who are authority figures in our lives, and who send us out to do a task.

Have you ever attended a parent night with a child at his/her school? The children are always so excited to share what they have learned in class, to have their parents meet their teacher. As I stated earlier, just simply acknowledging someone for their self – worth, their time and their effort is an amazing motivator, especially when they so freely and openly show their desire for it.

I see so many students each year who are starved for attention and acceptance. Sometimes their desire is so great that it leads them to negative behaviors or causes them to appear pestilent or overzealous. Here we find these first disciples excited by all that they had seen and done during their time away from their master and they are eager to share their good news with their mentor and teacher.

³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going

Each of us can deeply relate to this sentence because these words so accurately describe many of our lives. It seems that where ever we are or whatever we do life has become more and more of a rat-race. We know how busy we all are, with all our comings and goings, so much so that we don't even have time to eat.

Concentrate on the phrase, "many were coming and going" for just a moment. Isn't that so true of your life and mine? MANY in our communities today are in their own rat race. They are so busy with the demands of the world that they do not know if they are

coming or going. How many of us here today have become exhausted by our coming and going?

That they did not even have a chance to eat

Here is a familiar phrase for many of us, "did not even have a chance to eat." Think about the experiences in your own life and the life of your family and friends. Have you ever found yourself too busy to eat in leisure or to eat at all for that matter? Fast food stores have become the norm for many Americans. We find fast food chains on every street corner. Why are fast food stores so popular at this time in history? Because most of us are busy, busy, busy; not to mention that their dollar menus are easy on our wallets. Consider the "drive through" windows of the fast food restaurants? Around any meal time on any given day, you can find cars creating long, congested lines these windows. Years ago, though I don't remember it, there were no "drive through lines" in America and now they are common as can be. We no longer allow ourselves the time to eat leisurely. We eat in our cars, gulping down our food, while driving to the next point on our "check list" for the day.

In the text for today, Jesus being the great teacher that He is, is not teaching us about the great and grand issues of life such as loving God and our neighbor or about having a powerful faith that moves mountains. Rather, Jesus is teaching us about the simple things of life such as rest, solitude, quiet.

He said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

After Jesus listened to his disciples, he suggested that they go away to a quiet place all by themselves for a while. They had been enormously busy. They had been preaching and healing and sharing the gospel and participating in people's lives. Now it was time to take a breather; to go away and be alone; to stop and rest.

Jesus teaches us many things about life. Jesus teaches us about the way of love. Jesus teaches us about the power of belief. But Jesus also teaches us some other very basic simple things such as the need for a quiet place in order to rest.

“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” Isn’t that what you and I and our loved ones often need; a quiet place to rest and to recharge our battery? This sort of rest cannot be found in the waiting room at the doctor’s office or in the car on the way to your next destination on your “check list.” It can only be found in a place of solitude, a quite place, a place where you can sit and listen for the voice of God in your life.

What is that for you? Where is that for you? Where is your quiet place of rest? Do you go there often?

Maybe that place is at home. Maybe that place is a nice walk along a wooded path or a stroll along the beach or lakefront. I had a friend in graduate school who would rent a hotel room on the weekend, and she wouldn’t tell anyone where she was just so she could have a few moments of rest away from the chaos of the world. Regardless of your plan to find Solace, remember that it is Jesus who has invited you there. Be faithful to acknowledge his invitation and presence in the quite still. Jesus did not tell His Disciples to go and seek stillness, He said to them, “Come *with* me, by yourselves.” So, whether through conscious prayer or meditation, through the soft faint light of a candle or in the sound of rustling water; acknowledge and recognize His presence during your quiet time.

Remember, also, as you sit in quiet, to be still; not worrisome. So often, if you are addicted to busyness, activity and productivity like I am, you actually feel guilty about doing this. I find that my mind begins to race and I can always think of a million things that need to be done. Sometimes I pressure God for an answer to a question; almost to the point of drowning out His reply with my worry and angst.

It’s even possible when you are addicted to busyness, activity, and productivity, that you may actually find that you don’t know how to be still and quiet; to stop and rest. That

is where prayer and relationship come into play. Pray that God will bless your quiet time with the serenity that you need. Pray that He will remove the distractions of your heart and mind and He will help you displace those distractions. God commanded are trust in times of stillness when through the Psalmist he said, "Be still and know that I am God." To know that God is God sounds so simple, but often it is enough to calm our worry and relieve or angst.

³²So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.

We can see the disciples getting into a boat, a large boat that would accommodate all of them, and they were going to a deserted place, a solitary place, by themselves.

That is what many of us would to do. It's what my friend Barbara used to do in graduate school. We all find ourselves desiring to go to a deserted place; a place apart from telephones, cell phones, computers, radios and TV . . . not always alone, but to go to such places with our closest family and friends.

Jesus was their shepherd, their leader and their guide. Jesus knew that it was time for his disciples to rest and recuperate, and to be alone in the wilderness; away from the demands of the world.

In the gospel story for today, Jesus does not teach us about the great and grand themes of loving God and neighbor. Jesus does not teach us about the great and grand theme of the power of faith. Rather, in today's story, Jesus our good and wise shepherd, is leading us to rest in green pastures and lie down by still waters and thereby restore our soul. Today, Jesus is teaching us about the wisdom and necessity of finding a quiet place with other loved ones. He is teaching us to take time out of our busy lives and to stop and rest.

So as we go from this place today, back to the demands and challenges of our lives, be reminded that Jesus has commanded us to go with Him to a quiet place, to stop and to rest. Will you meet him there, wherever that may be, this week? Amen.