



Liturgical Day: The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Date: June 19, 2009

Sermon Title: A Prescription for Sabbath

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

There is a remarkable contrast in this morning's text. On the one hand, we have the disciples of Jesus. We have been following the story for some four weeks in our Gospel lessons. It begins with a disaster at sea, when Jesus comes to them and stills the waters (4:37). It continues as the disciples are sent out two-by-two to continue the ministry of Jesus in the surrounding villages and towns and to witness miracle after miracle (6:7). In today's text, Jesus withdraws with them for a time of rest, but is interrupted with the opportunity to continue his ministry of healing (6:33). Our text unfortunately skips over the section where Jesus feeds some five thousand families, and the disciples experience another disaster at sea, and the saving presence of Jesus (6:51). Yet through it all, they are depicted as uninspired, unaware of the power of Jesus, and having hearts that are too hardened to see what is so clearly visible in their midst (6:52). On the one hand we have the disciples of Jesus.

On the other hand, we have the people of the Galilean countryside. They respond to Jesus with unbelief in his own hometown (6:6), but are otherwise remarkably responsive, coming from all around, trusting in his healing power, begging to receive the gifts that Jesus has come to bring, and carrying those who are unwell for miles and miles, just on the chance that one of them might happen to touch the hem of Jesus' garment.

I am intrigued by this contrast between those dense, unbelieving disciples (who have seen everything and who still don't get it), and those faithful, trusting people (who have only heard about Jesus, but who come from great distance and at considerable cost, to be touched by him).

Why do the disciples have such a difficult time seeing what is right before their eyes? Why are their hearts so hard? Remember how St. Mark describes them:

- He writes that many are coming and going.
- They have no leisure, even to eat.
- They are pressed in by the crowds.
- They have become uninspired; unaware.

And so Jesus, aware of this contrast as well, says to them at the beginning of today's text:

Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.

At the very heart of this story is the fact that Jesus knows the essential power of Sabbath. He practices it himself. (Think of that: even the one whom we have come to know as "fully God" needed rest and renewal!) He seeks it for his disciples, because he knows that even those who are immersed in the work of God, and the work of the church, can become so consumed by the business and the busy-ness of it all, that there is no time or energy or focus left to nurture the soul – to grow in faith.

Many are coming and going. They have no leisure, even to eat. They are pressed in by the crowds. They have become uninspired; unaware. And so Jesus calls them to a deserted place, all by themselves, where they can rest awhile.

This is an important text for our day, because the truth is: many of us are in the same position as those disciples – myself included! We live in one of the busiest times in all of history. It could be said of us that many are coming and

FIRST LESSON
JEREMIAH 23:1-6

PSALM
PSALM 23

SECOND LESSON
EPHESIANS 2:11-22

GOSPEL LESSON
ST. MARK 6:30-34, 53-56

SEMICONTINUOUS SERIES:
2 SAMUEL 7:1-14A
PSALM 89:20-37

PRAYER OF THE DAY
O GOD, POWERFUL AND COMPASSIONATE, YOU SHEPHERD YOUR PEOPLE, FAITHFULLY FEEDING AND PROTECTING US. HEAL EACH OF US, AND MAKE US A WHOLE PEOPLE, THAT WE MAY EMBODY THE JUSTICE AND PEACE OF YOUR SON, JESUS CHRIST, OUR SAVIOR AND LORD. AMEN.

**9300 E. BELLEVIEW AVE.
GREENWOOD VILLAGE,
COLORADO 80111**

VOICE
(303) 770-9300

FAX
(303) 770-9301

WEB
WWW.STPLC.ORG



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

going. We often don't have leisure, even to eat. We are pressed in by our many commitments and obligations. We can find ourselves becoming uninspired and unaware. The pace of our lives leaves us unable to direct sufficient time to developing our faith, and drawing nearer to the promises of God.

At a certain level, I can identify with the disciples. I know that I am a very fortunate person. I am able to spend the majority of my time with believers, most of whom are seeking to do God's work. It is a rich blessing to be in my position, and I am thankful for it. At the same time, the work of the church can leave us with so much to do, that we also become too busy to grow in faith. Too busy to tend to our own relationships with God. Too busy to experience the presence of Jesus in our lives.

That's why this past week was such a blessing for me. Each summer, I try to spend a week at Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp, serving as a Pastor in Residence for one of their camps. This year, instead of staying at the main site for the entire week as I usually do, I had the opportunity to experience a "Compass Points" adventure camp. Along with my son, Landon, and with Scott and Matthew Bainbridge, we spent a day rock climbing, a day rafting, and three days backpacking in the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness Area. It was a remarkable time. It was an opportunity to open our hearts to the beauty of God's creation. It was a time to experience the presence of Christ in the gathered community (both the larger community at camp, and the smaller community of those who were out on the trail with us). It was a time to reflect on the Word, and consider what it means to live as a faithful follower of Jesus Christ.

We spent time this past week, literally and figuratively, in a deserted place. And God was there with us, as promised. We all returned home yesterday filled and inspired, and renewed for faithful living. That's what the concept of Sabbath is all about. That's what Jesus wanted for his disciples, who had become uninspired and unaware. And that is what Jesus wants for us, when we become consumed with the busy-ness of our own lives.

I once read a review of a very interesting piece of research. It had to do with independence and connectedness in the lives of very young children. To conduct the research, observations were made at a local play area for toddlers. The actions of each individual child in the play area were mapped out, and they displayed a remarkable degree of consistency. Each child would wander throughout the playground, sometimes wandering to the far edge of the enclosure. But at consistent and eventually predictable intervals, each child would return to where Mom or Dad was seated on a park bench to say hello, or to hug, or to have a drink. Some children wandered farther and longer than others. And some children stayed near to Mom or Dad for a longer time than others. But each child had his or her pattern of coming and going.

The researchers concluded that for these young children, playing in the park was an important but taxing experience. They could enjoy themselves for only so long, before they needed the touch of a parent to assure them and provide the confidence they needed to head back out into the fray. And so their play time was shaped by this pattern of going out and enjoying the experience, then coming back to be reassured that Mom or Dad are still there, and then going out again.

Truth be known, most of us never really leave that pattern. What is true for the youngest members of our community is true for the older members of our community as well. Some of us go for longer periods of time before returning to those places where we are renewed and invigorated. But we all return there periodically to receive what we need to continue.

So it is with the life of faith. God has great expectations for what you and I will accomplish together. God wants nothing less than the transformation of this entire world. And God has sent us – you and me – into the world to accomplish this agenda. That's a pretty tall order. If one thing is clear, it is this: we'll never get the job done in our lifetime. You and I can expect to die, still faced with the task of completely transforming the world. But something else is clear as well: God knows that we are being sent to do a job that we cannot do on our own strength. There is no way that 450 people from south-metro Denver have the capacity to transform the entire world, much less keep at it year after year after year. So God provides us with the strength to do what we cannot do on our own. Through the presence of Christ in the meal; through the proclamation of the word; through the movement of the Holy Spirit in the gathered community of faith; as we come together in this place, God is hard at work, strengthening each one of us for the ministry to which we are called.

And so the pattern seen in the playground with those small children continues in the life of the church. We are sent into the world to be the presence of Christ in the midst of great pain and discord. We return to places like this, and allow God to heal us and renew us. And then we are sent back out again, for another chance to be God's transforming presence for the whole world.

The interesting thing is, both the gathering here to be strengthened and the sending out to make a difference in the world are vital components of what it means to be a faithful congregation, and what it means to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. And so Jesus teaches us today that if we want to be faithful at what God has called us to do, we must find regular times of Sabbath in our lives. Make weekly worship an important part of the rhythm of your lives, as you have done this morning. Take time each day to spend time with God in prayer and devotion. Join us in September as we read through the Bible together in 90 days.

It is only as we stay faithful to this command to find Sabbath time that we are able to respond with enthusiasm and confidence to the final words of this morning's worship: Go in peace. Serve the Lord. (Congregation responds: "Thanks be to God.") Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (July 19, 2009)

Gospel Lesson; English Text: ⁱ

^{6:30} The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³² And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴ As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴ When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, ⁵⁵ and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed. ⁱⁱ

Gospel Lesson; Greek Text:

^{6:30} Καὶ συνάγονται οἱ ἀπόστολοι πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ ἀπήγγειλαν αὐτῷ πάντα ὅσα ἐποίησαν καὶ ὅσα ἐδίδαξαν. ³¹ καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· δεῦτε ὑμεῖς αὐτοὶ κατ' ἰδίαν εἰς ἔρημον τόπον καὶ ἀναπαύσασθε ὀλίγον. ἦσαν γὰρ οἱ ἐρχόμενοι καὶ οἱ ὑπάγοντες πολλοί, καὶ οὐδὲ φαγεῖν εὐκαίρουν. ³² Καὶ ἀπήλθον ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ εἰς ἔρημον τόπον κατ' ἰδίαν. ³³ καὶ εἶδον αὐτοὺς ὑπάγοντας καὶ ἐπέγνωσαν πολλοὶ καὶ πεζῆ ἀπὸ πασῶν τῶν πόλεων συνέδραμον ἐκεῖ καὶ προῆλθον αὐτούς. ³⁴ Καὶ ἐξελθὼν εἶδεν πολὺν ὄχλον καὶ ἐσπλαγχνίσθη ἐπ' αὐτούς, ὅτι ἦσαν ὡς πρόβατα μὴ ἔχοντα ποιμένα, καὶ ἤρξατο διδάσκειν αὐτοὺς πολλὰ.

⁵³ Καὶ διαπεράσαντες ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἦλθον εἰς Γεννησαρὲτ καὶ προσωμίσθησαν. ⁵⁴ καὶ ἐξελθόντων αὐτῶν ἐκ τοῦ πλοίου εὐθὺς ἐπιγνόντες αὐτὸν ⁵⁵ περιέδραμον ὅλην τὴν χώραν ἐκείνην καὶ ἤρξαντο ἐπὶ τοῖς κραβάττοις τοὺς κακῶς ἔχοντας περιφέρειν ὅπου ἤκουον ὅτι ἐστίν. ⁵⁶ καὶ ὅπου ἂν εἰσεπορεύετο εἰς κώμας ἢ εἰς πόλεις ἢ εἰς ἀγρούς, ἐν ταῖς ἀγοραῖς ἐτίθεσαν τοὺς ἀσθενοῦντας καὶ παρεκάλουν αὐτὸν ἵνα κἂν τοῦ κρασπέδου τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ ἄψωνται· καὶ ὅσοι ἂν ἤψωντο αὐτοῦ ἐσώζοντο. ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Lectionary.aspx>

ⁱⁱ St. Mark 6:30-34, 53-56, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

ⁱⁱⁱ St. Mark 6:30-34, 53-56, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).