

RECLAIMING SABBATH REST

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

At the risk of sounding like a Grandmother, oh wait, I am a grandmother!! Well then, at the risk of sounding like some old person...shucks...I qualify for that as well. Let me try yet again... How many of you have ever said the following phrase... "In the good old days!"

In my sermon preparation this past week I found a somewhat 'tongue in cheek' account of the good old days of the 1950's and '60's! Looking back, it was the best of times. AND it is somewhat hard to believe that we have managed to live as long as we have. Perhaps you remember the good old days like this. As children, we would ride in cars with no seat belts or air bags. Riding in the back of a pickup truck on a warm day was always a special treat.

Our houses and baby cribs were covered with bright colored lead-based paint. We had no childproof lids on medicine bottles, doors, or cabinets, and when we rode our bikes, we had no helmets. We slept without flame retardant pajamas, without air conditioning, with doors and windows open. We raced around town without adults on Halloween, collecting treats and eating them as we went along without having them x-rayed first. We drank water from the garden hose and not from a bottle. We would spend hours building our go-carts out of scraps and then rode down the hill, only to find out we forgot the brakes. After running into the bushes a few times we learned to solve the problem.

There were tryouts for cheerleader and Little League, and not everyone made the teams. Those who didn't had to learn to deal with disappointment. Some students weren't as smart as others so they failed a grade and were held back to repeat the same grade as many times as necessary. We didn't wear designer clothes to school or drive shiny new cars to high school. If we had a car to drive, we were happy with anything that would run no matter what it looked like.

Sunday mornings also, were fairly typical in most households. You could find the 4 von Trapp sisters dutifully getting ready for Sunday Mass wearing our dresses, ankle socks and patent leather shoes. In the summer months, the 2 boys wore seer sucker suits longing for the day they would graduate to long pants. Papa always wore a suit and tie, Mom her Sunday best sometimes matching her daughters dresses.

After church was our weekly brunch: bacon, eggs, coffee cake, croissants, fruit...the whole nine yards. And, afternoons were devoted to family time, visiting the grandparents and cousins in the fall, winter and spring months, while they visited us at the beach in the summer. Backyard cookouts, games of croquet and badminton, and horseshoes were standard fare. Ice cream cones for dessert from Simmons Store, catching fire flies and sleepy kids were the order for the evening as the family members slowly returned to their homes. Without fail, Sundays began with church, followed by a time of rest, and time spent with family.

Our text for this morning begins with the apostles returning from being sent out two by two with stories of where they had been and what they had taught, when Jesus beckons to them in verse 31: Then Jesus said, “Let’s go to a place where we can be alone and get some rest.” They left in a boat for a place where they could be alone. Yet, as we see in the remainder of the text, the people followed and would not leave them alone. This sounds an awful lot like a pretty good description of the lives of many people today.

Too busy to pause for a real lunch some of my chaplain colleagues munch on their lunch while working at their desk. Teens grab Jimmy Dean breakfast sandwiches on their way out the door to school. Parents and children drive through a succession of fast-food restaurants between after-school lessons and sports practices. Commuters sip double lattes on the early morning drive to Charlottesville, gnaw on baby carrots during meetings and pick up take out on the way home. Toddlers practically live in their car seats eating cereal and other finger food so the rest of the family can keep up with their hectic schedules. We are a society of people who are controlled by our schedules leaving little or no time for family meals. When our Matt was a high school student 1991-1995, he was the only one of his classmates who regularly ate his evening meal as a family.

It is no surprise that family meals are important times to reconnect with one another, find support for decisions and challenges, and simply enjoy one another. But, did you know it is important also for us to gather as the community of faith to rest from our labors, and partake of a common meal? Why is this? It is really quite simple. You and I need times to return from our individual activities – activities we have done for the sake of Jesus and re-form ourselves as the Body of Christ. Think about it for a minute. If we do not take time to reconnect with each other we could easily become broken and poured out so many times that we cease to be useful for the Kingdom of God on earth. We can become so caught up in the busyness of ministry that we forget to spend time with the One who directs out teaching, healing and justice seeking work.

This resonates deeply with me. This past year I needed to take a “break” from my 17+ years of parish ministry. Quite frankly I was burned out and had lost much of my love for working with the body of Christ. My “break” consisted of working with people in crisis... always in crisis. But part of my time at UVA was spent on personal growth... learning and relearning things that I had forgotten or had gotten lost in the busyness of parish ministry. I also re-discovered my love and passion for ministry that includes a person’s complete being; not just the person in crisis. While the message of verses 30-34 can seem to be a contradiction – set yourselves apart for divine and physical sustenance; set aside your own retreat when others are in need of spiritual sustenance. After 8 months of Chaplain work this does not seem like a contradiction at all. You see if I don’t take care of myself, body, mind and spirit, I cannot take care of those around me with needs. How can I possibly keep on giving of myself, if I am not filled up with the One source and power that gives me the ability, energy and strength to go on.

Sabbath rest is not meant to be a designated time of goofing off. It is a time to intentionally seek to be in the presence of God all the while giving your bodies, mind and spirit

a rest. Wednesday afternoons in seminary were sometimes a challenge. We had a 3 hour class period immediately following lunch. Each week the class began with a 20-25 minute quiet time of meditating on a particular scripture. Our bellies were full and the sun was often streaming into the class room making it pleasantly warm. A scripture was shared and we were invited to picture ourselves in the parable. What do you suppose happened most weeks given these conditions. It did not take long to see heads bobbing and jerking back up as we struggled to stay awake. One time, however, the message was about Jesus meeting blind Bartimaeus from Mark 10:46. Jesus asks Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" As a class we were instructed to place ourselves in the place of Bartimaeus and respond to Jesus' question; then to hear Jesus' response. This happened at a time I was struggling with my hearing in classes; I was frustrated and angry, and now I was being told to hear what Jesus wanted to say to me.

So...in the quiet of that time I pictured a very angry Tizzy storming up to Jesus quietly screaming, "Hear what you say to me??? I. Can't. Hear!" And then...I heard Jesus. "Listen to me with the ears of your heart." "What??" And again gentle words filled me, "Listen to me with the ears of your heart."

Friends we must learn to pay attention to God's presence and surrender willingly to God's will. Such surrender requires that Christians trust God to provide for all their needs, whether through times of spiritual retreat or through actively working to minister to God's people. 18th century Spiritual Director Jean-Pierre de Caussade wrote, "Everything turns to bread to nourish me, soap to wash me, fire to purify me, and a chisel to fashion me in the image of God. Grace supplies all my needs.

So What?? The past couple of weeks you have heard me allude to God's vision for Marquis, the needs of our surrounding community, and our need to be nurtured for the work God asks of each of us whatever our walk in life. I don't know what draws you to be here, but I hope part of your reasoning is to be fed with spiritual food, and to be showered with the grace of Jesus Christ to return to the world for yet another week. I would call that renewal a healing of sorts. A Sabbath Rest. And truly, we are all in need of healing, not just of our bodies, but even more so of our minds and spirits. We are living in difficult and contentious times, something that Facebook does not help. I don't know about you, but I need to be reminded often, daily, sometimes more than once a day of who I am and to whom I belong. I need to look in the mirror and see what is there. Are my thoughts and actions those that would please God? When people look at me do they see God's grace? I hope this is what's next for all of us.

Being a follower of Jesus Christ is much more than being able to claim the promise of the resurrection, it is much greater than the assurance that when we die we will go to heaven. Being a follower of Jesus Christ means that we intentionally seek to build the Kingdom of God on earth...as it is in heaven! What we have within these walls is part of this Kingdom, and just as you and I come to church in need of God's grace, the body of Christ, AKA this church family, engages in ministry because we need to live as Christ has commanded – that we are the body of Christ sent into the world to help God repair the brokenness caused by sin. We need to begin to "Listen with the ears of our hearts!" That's what's next!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.