

Rest Stop

a sermon

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Mark 6:30–34, 53–56

Jesus was tired. His disciples were tired. They were all tired, and they needed rest.

Now, it was a *good* tired, I tell you.

You know what I mean by a “good tired,” right?

Yeah, this was the kind of tired you feel after doing important work and doing it well. There’s a sense of accomplishment in good tired. So it’s different than the kind of tired you feel when there’s no sense of completion, when it has all seemed so pointless. With good tired, you know that both the during and the after of the tired are worth it.

Even so, the tired of good tired is not *pretend* tired. It’s not something *besides* tired. No, it’s really, genuinely, tired.

Jesus and his disciples were really tired.

They were low on physical energy.

They were short on mental acuity.

Their bodies had been stretched and their minds had been taxed.

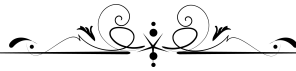
They had decision fatigue.

They had *fatigue*-fatigue.

They needed to stop.

They needed to rest.

They needed a rest stop.



So Jesus decides that they have to get away for a bit. He tells them they are going to take a retreat, find a rest stop, to stop and rest and recharge.

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

Sounds great! Let’s go!

So off they go. They pile into the bus, I mean, into the boat, and head out to this quiet little spot in the middle of nowhere, a nice little retreat center run by some aging hippies.

It’s got Adirondack chairs on a wrap-around porch.

Fair-trade coffee.

Granola.

And a golden retriever named “Bo.”

Now maybe the trip down the lake was restful. After all, it was a break from the crowds.

Yes, the crowds:

always surrounding them,
always needing them,
always requiring so much work from them.

So maybe they got some rest there, away from the crowds, in the boat.

After all, it *was* a boat and not a bus that got Jesus and the disciples from there to the other there..... unlike us, who can rush from one place to the next

in cars
and buses
and trains
and planes.

And in those vehicles we can still be reached by those wanting something from us,

an answer,
a decision,
some advice,
some attention,

leaving us with very little in-between time, very little down time.

Yes, unlike us, Jesus and the disciples lived in a world in which travel was always long and drawn out.

They usually had quite a bit of in-between time.
And on this journey

from their labors to their retreat,
from their ongoing work to their rest stop,

they were able to be away from the crowds of people.

I'm sure they appreciated the gift of restful time, kind of a "pre-retreat."

But maybe it wasn't like that. Maybe instead the trip down the lake was yet more work. Then as now, then even more than now, traveling can be hard. Maneuvering a boat on a large lake takes strength and skill. It taxes the body and the mind.

So on their way to the retreat center,

with the aging hippies,
and the Adirondack chairs,
and the wrap-around porch,
and the fair trade coffee,
and the granola,
and the golden retriever named "Bo,"

Jesus and the disciples may have been yearning even more for their rest stop, as they rowed or tacked their way down the lake.

They were really looking forward to their rest.
But the rest stop would not hold much rest for them.



You see, there were some people on the shore who spotted their boat on the water, and recognized it. They could tell where they were heading, that quiet little retreat center run by the aging hippies

with the Adirondack chairs,
and the wrap-around porch,
and the fair trade coffee,
and the granola,
and the golden retriever named “Bo.”

So they ran ahead, along the shore, to make it to the retreat center,

and the aging hippies,
and the porch,
and the coffee,
and the granola,
and Bo,

before Jesus and his disciples got there.

Which means that when Jesus and the gang stepped off the boat, it wasn't only the aging hippies and Bo who met them, but all these people the disciples thought they were getting away from.

Oh, joy!

This might have been a big disappointment to the disciples. (Think how you'd feel!)

To top it off, these people had used up all the coffee and granola before the disciples had even gotten out of the boat. Bummer!

But if Jesus had been disappointed, he didn't show it. He didn't say it. Instead, we're told this:

“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.”

Jesus sees the crowd. He has compassion for them. Why? “Because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” So he does for them what he was sent to do, what they needed him to do:

He teaches them.

He cares for them.

He becomes their shepherd.

Now after Jesus had finished with that crowd, maybe *then* he and the disciples could finally get their rest.

But again they're interrupted.

They sail back across the lake, and as soon as they get to the shore they're again swarmed by people.

All of them wanting Jesus.

All of them needing Jesus.

And Jesus ... doesn't send them away.

He doesn't tell them, “Not today; it's our day off.”

He doesn't put a “Closed” sign in the front window.

He doesn't hide with the granola and coffee he had bought from the hippies (who had a secret stash, just for him).

No, instead he helps them. He blesses them. He heals them.

The rest stop would have to wait.



Now, I have to tell you that I'm a bit frustrated with this passage. I am. Because it all seems like one big psych-out. "Let's have some rest," Jesus says. And then, "Nope! No rest for you!"

What are we supposed to learn from this? What is it that we should understand from this?

That real Christians don't get to rest? (Come on, now.)

That church work never ends? (Tell us something we don't know.)

That "you can't always get what you want?"

So many are tired. So many feel that their work is unending. So many feel beat up by their work.

Even among Christians, there is such an unhealthy relationship with and understanding of work.

We ping-pong back and forth

between overwork and idleness,

between doing too much and doing too little,

between workaholism and sloth,

between idolizing work and demonizing it,

between seeing work as our savior and regarding work as our mortal enemy.

We struggle with that elusive thing commonly (and unhelpfully) called "work-life balance," which only seems to mock our struggle and deny us the rest we need.

Here in this church, it's becoming harder and harder to find people willing to share in the work we have before us, leaving the few to do even more. And those few, I tell you, are reaching their limit. Some of them desperately need a rest stop.

Is Jesus telling them they can't have one?

Are *we* telling them they can't have one?

To be honest, I may not have this right, or what I have right is likely incomplete. But in this passage I hear some things that I *think* are right.

I hear the absolutely unique strength of Jesus.

I hear his love for those who need him.

I hear his compassion on those who are beat up by the work of life.

I hear his joy in the work that belongs to him:

the teaching of souls,

the shepherding of sheep,

the feeding and healing of bodies.

I hear his blessing of that work.

I hear him doing that work *on* us, and I hear him sharing that work *with* us:

the teaching of souls,
the shepherding of sheep,
the feeding and healing of bodies.

I hear him declaring that such work,

when we do it with him,
under him,
for him,
enlivened and blessed by him,

brings with it a good tired.

I hear him assuring us that although the rest stop might be delayed, it will eventually arrive.
And at that rest stop we will find waiting for us, ready for our arrival, not just

the aging hippies,
and the Adirondack chairs,
and the wrap-around porch,
and the fair trade coffee,
and the granola,
and the golden retriever named “Bo.”

We will find Jesus himself, who has not only prepared the rest stop for us, but has guided us all along in our work, blessing our labors, filling our hearts, and giving us along the way such rest as we may need for the journey.