

Rested?
Mark 6:30-45

Pastor Liz Miller
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All week folks have been asking me how my sabbatical was. I should have expected this question. I've had three months to prepare for it, but every time I am asked, I find myself at a loss for words. It's wasn't one trip or one experience or one revelation...My sabbatical was three months of my life being turned upside down in the best possible way, completely reorienting my daily life, my relationships, how I understood who I was and what I am called to do.

It was an entire season, a quarter of the year 2021, committed to deep rest and renewal. It was an entire season of not being at Edgewood, but that just meant I did a lot of thinking about and praying for our church. It was a season of missing you stacked on top of an already long year of missing you in person. It was a sabbatical season of dreaming what this next chapter of our future will hold, of being excited to return to this place and reconnect or perhaps connect for the first time with all of you. I can assure you that I will have many sabbatical stories for you in the coming weeks and months, maybe more than you bargained for.

What it is important for you to know today is that I have returned an evangelical for rest. I am on fire for rest. Not the kind of rest you get when you lay down on the couch and close your eyes for twenty minutes before getting up and cooking dinner. Not the kind of rest that comes when you log off your last Zoom meeting for the day and sigh with weary relief. I'm talking about the kind of rest that can't be hurried or allocated a time limit. It's the kind of deep rest that comes after weeks of listening to your body and honoring what it needs. The kind of rest that

comes from defining your days with spaciousness - making sure you have enough time to transition from one activity to the next without rushing, leaving time in your day to wonder in your imagination and wander around your house or around the block or through the woods across the street from your house, wherever you feel like going in the moment. It is a dreamy, heart-rate lowering, stress eliminating kind of rest that I am evangelizing for.

After a summer of restorative rest I am here to say that if someone tells you all you have to do is tweak your habits or change one little thing to feel more rested, they are lying to you. It's about more than going to bed ten minutes earlier or turning off the alarm clock. It's a lifestyle. It's a commitment. Rest is liberation. When you feel rested deep in your soul, your thinking is clearer and your heart is full. You know how we talk about people who go through an experience that suddenly makes their priorities clear or helps them realize what is most important in the world? Often we talk about that experience in relationship to some sort of crisis that we survive, but this summer I found that same clarity in my season of rest, and now I am longing for everyone I encounter to have their own experience. Thus, I've returned an evangelist.

I'm pretty sure that Jesus was also an evangelist for rest. This summer I studied the moments of rest that appear in the Gospels. Jesus rested up on a mountainside, he rested for his own season of reflection by himself out in a desert, and he was once found sleeping on a boat while everyone else was up worrying about the weather. Jesus knew how to take a time out and replenish himself with rest and prayer. Rest and prayer were often linked together, prayer coming only during times of rest.

I am appreciative of Jesus's commitment to rest, and I especially love that he doesn't hoard it for himself. There are moments when Jesus goes off to rest and he takes a few of his

disciples with him. They would have been tired too. Today's Gospel story starts out with a group of very tired disciples finding Jesus and telling him everything they have been doing. "We taught the children, we healed the sick, we spread good news across three villages and Jesus, we're tired! This work is exhausting!" Before they crumple in a pile before him, Jesus says to them, "You've done enough for now. Come to a quiet place and rest awhile." He leads them away from the crowds. I love that Jesus is caring for the disciples and encourages them to rest. In doing this he is telling them, as hard as you work, you also need to care for yourselves and take a break. No one is exempt from needing this.

But feeling tired and trying to find a way to rest is never the whole story, is it? Isn't it more likely that when we're super tired and just about to lay down, something happens? Your kid wakes up from a nightmare and cries out for you? The first day of vacation comes and your boss calls with a work emergency? You sit down after a long day and your dog decides it's time to play? It seems like there is always something threatening to get in the way of truly relaxing. If the disciples were here they would be saying, "Amen! Ain't that the truth!"

Because when Jesus leads the disciples off to a place where they can finally get some peace and quiet, the crowds follow them. They figure out where they are heading and they beat the disciples there. This crowd is hungry and Jesus is filled with compassion for them but the disciples aren't having any of it. They say, "Can't you send them away and tell them to go feed themselves?!" In other words: Tell the kid to go back to sleep, it was just a dream! Tell your boss to find someone else to fix the problem! Tell the dog to lay down and stop barking! WE'RE TIRED.

The disciples are so cranky that they can't problem solve and start to make things more complicated than it needs to be. (I don't relate to that at all.) When Jesus says they need to feed the crowd, the disciples complain about having to go out and buy tons of food and spend all their money, and walk three miles to the grocery store and before they can feel even more sorry for themselves Jesus cuts them off and says, "Why don't we just give them the food we already have on hand? Whatever we have will be enough. Let's not make more work for ourselves."

And it was that simple. The crowd ate and was filled. The disciples breathed a sigh of relief. The last line of the story reads like this: Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.

There was a time when I would have heard this story and only paid attention to the miracle of the multiplying loaves. There was another time when I would have read this story and been resentful that the disciples had to do one more thing when they just wanted to take a nap. But here is how I understand this story today: Jesus did not ask the disciples to make a miracle. He asked them to do the least amount of work possible to care for this crowd by using what they already had. They didn't need to buy more. They didn't need to go bake bread. He didn't send them out fishing. Jesus told them, "If you have something you can give, give it." You don't need to be more than you are or someone that you're not. You don't need to be super human or super rich. Just do what you can and know that it will be enough.

And, when they didn't have anything left to give, Jesus sent them away and he finished the work. Immediately. There came a time when the disciples need for rest could not be denied and so Jesus said, "I've got this. I'll handle the crowd. Get on that boat and get out of here. Rest. Immediately."

This Gospel story is a story for 2021. It is so apparent to me that there are people in our community who are tired and weary and in need of rest. Parents who have made too many impossible decisions. Healthcare workers who are fighting an ever rising tide of illness. Students and teachers and workers of all sorts who no longer know what constitutes safety or risk. People who are weary from natural disasters and man made wars, who stay up all night worrying about the future of our world instead of sleeping. There are people who feel like they haven't been able to catch a break in the last year, the last two years. If you are tired, I want you to know that when you come into this sanctuary, when you enter this sacred space, you will never be asked or expected to give more than you have in you. If you are asked to do something and you say, "I'm tired," we will tell you to do what you can and then get in the boat and go rest. Immediately.

And, there are people with us today who are hungry. Hungry to know and be in relationship with people who share similar beliefs. Hungry to belong to a community. Hungry to be loved. Hungry to be cared for. If you are hungry, I want you to know that when you come into this sanctuary, when you enter this sacred space, you will always be offered something to eat. There will always be a space for you at the table. This is a place where people are fed.

And, there are people in our community who are full and rested. People who feel really fortunate for what they have in their lives, feel connected to their neighbors and know their lives have meaning. Not perfect people, not by any means, but for whatever reason, maybe you have just gotten back from a long sabbatical or maybe it's just your turn to have a full season: we need you too. We need people who are willing to tag out the tired ones so they can rest. People who are able to problem solve to see what we have in front of us so that we can feed people, but not overly complicate things in the process. People who are ready to serve. If you are full and rested,

I want you to know that when you come into this sanctuary, when you enter this sacred space, you will hear a call to serve, to love, to step up so that someone else can sit down and rest.

We have always been here together, the tired, the hungry, the ready to serve. But sometimes we forget to tell that story. Instead we focus on the miracle. We talk about how we all witnessed it together and we blur the details that look differently depending on who we were and where we were sitting or what role we played. But folks, the world isn't getting any simpler. The crises and the grief and the pandemics are not going away. It doesn't help anyone when we pretend that we are full if we are really hungry. It doesn't help anyone if we conceal our tired eyes instead of taking a turn to rest. It doesn't help anyone if we're ready to serve but don't speak up.

I was talking with Rev. Kit Carlson from All Saints about this story this week and she said, "You know what my favorite part about it is? Everyone gets their needs met. No one gets too much. No one gets left out. At the end of the story, when when we all work together, everyone gets their needs met." In the name of working smarter and not harder, I don't have anything else to add to Rev. Kit's insight. That sounds like Good News. May it be so. Amen.