

Mark 6:30-34

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

July 25, 2021

Did you have a vacation yet this summer? How was it? Some vacations are exhilarating: days in a beautiful location with exciting or relaxing activities (whichever appeal to you). Others may be exhausting. Perhaps you tried to cram too much into the time off and you need to return to work to rest up. Some vacations bring disaster: a vehicle breakdown that blows your schedule or your budget, bad weather or uncomfortable accommodations. Or maybe you have been unable to afford either the time or the expense for a vacation yet this year. Summer is a time when many families take time off, and that can be good for us. Today in the text our Savior invites

COME FOR REST

- I. Rest for tired bodies v30-32
- II. Rest for troubled souls v33-34

We welcome the invitation of our Lord Jesus to come and receive rest for our tired bodies. The twelve disciples needed rest also as they returned from a preaching mission. Jesus had sent them out in pairs as part of their training and to assist in reaching the people of Galilee. They were to share the message of the Savior, calling the people to repentance for their sins and faith that they were forgiven by the Lord. Although it is a great task, it is work. I mention that because when I was just about to be confirmed, I mentioned to a relative that I wanted to be a pastor. He sort of scoffed at the idea: "That's not much of a job—all you do is read from a book."

In his instructions, Jesus had let them know that some people would reject their message. They would not welcome them with open arms despite the universal need for the Savior they proclaimed. Some individuals are steeped in indifference to matters spiritual; others look to different (that is, false) gods or think they can handle their spiritual needs on their own. Whatever the reason, they turn off or tune out the preaching of God's messengers, at times even responding with anger. In such instances, Jesus told the Twelve to shake the dust off their feet as a testimony that they were taking nothing with them. Then move on, as there are plenty more people to reach.

He didn't send them out helpless. He equipped them with the ability to heal diseases and to cast out demons from those who were possessed by the evil spirits. These miracles connected them with Jesus' ministry, showing they operated with divine authority. That message was not only a witness to their hearers but it gave reassurance to the disciples themselves.

In the time period they had been gone, the apostles had experiences both exciting and challenging. Upon their return they were bubbling with reports of the marvels they had witnessed as sinners came to faith and of troubles they had met. I can imagine they were like school children all trying to report on their day. (I'm talking about younger students. I know that teenagers are less talkative when it comes to school. "How was your day?" "OK." "What did you learn?" "Not much." "Anything exciting happen?" "Not really," is a typical conversation with them.) But when they are younger, each one has lots to tell and races to get his or her report in first and loudest. That's how I picture the scene when the disciples returned.

They needed time to report, to reflect on their experiences, to share with one another not only what had happened but approaches that worked and those that didn't, and then to learn more from Jesus. They needed to unwind. It is important to take care of our physical health.

They also needed to relax in a busy time. Capernaum was constantly humming with activity when Jesus and His disciples were around. "So many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat." There was so much to do, it could wear anyone out.

A while earlier Herod had ordered the beheading of John the Baptist. That report could also create stress. Would the king's attention turn next to them? Mental health is also important to address.

So the loving and concerned Savior issued the invitation, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." They boarded a boat and sailed across the north end of the Sea of Galilee, headed for a less congested area for some down time.

That is good to do. God gave His Old Testament people the Third Commandment which called for a day of rest. While its primary focus was spiritual it was a time to put aside their daily routine. Bodies and minds need to recharge. A constant flow of duty will sap energy and render you less productive or creative. Of course, time off can be overdone. The purpose of taking a break is to rejuvenate yourself for more work and for using your abilities to serve the Lord and other people, not to encourage laziness. Taking a break doesn't always mean doing nothing. Sometimes you just need a change of pace. Those who are regularly around people or who perform mental work or desk jobs may find the needed pick-me-up in performing physical labor. Get outdoors, dig in the dirt or pound some nails. Use your muscles and work out the stress. Those who do secular work may find

delight in helping with a church project like Vacation Bible School or canvassing for a mission. Then you come back ready to go at your regular job. WELS Kingdom Workers offers opportunities for such work in other locations.

While we realize the benefit in taking time off, we also recognize the limitations. We will get tired again. Work has that effect on us in a sinful world. Summertime hot and muggy weather reminds us of our need for rest for tired bodies.

II.

The lack of lasting relief also reminds us of a greater rest that is needed and that is provided, namely, rest for troubled souls. That need was evident in the crowd that followed Jesus and his disciples. Many people witnessed their departure and as they saw the boat head along the north shore of the sea, they figured out the destination and headed there on foot. As they passed through other towns, they spread the word and gathered more of a crowd. Some of them even arrived ahead of the boat. As Jesus and the apostles did spend some time together by themselves, even more gathered. Finally there was a large group. The whole event ended with the feeding of the five thousand and that was just the number of men, not counting the women and children.

The growing crowd was spiritually needy. Jesus could see that condition. As God he is able to discern the condition of our soul. The need prompted a response. "He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd." He was worked up internally by their need. It bothered him. The lack of a shepherd was not merely a manpower situation. There were religious leaders in Galilee at the synagogues and worshipers returned to Jerusalem for the high festivals. But they were not receiving adequate care. The rabbis did not tell of Jesus and the mission he had come to perform. Ideas about the Messiah had changed from the spiritual Savior from sin that God had promised to an earthly rescuer, a leader to restore worldly power for a subject nation. Some religious leaders were in it for the personal benefit. Many saw the externals of religious observance as all that were needed, and were not concerned with the condition of their hearts.

Jesus met the needs of the assembled crowd. Maybe he and the disciples had not received the full rest and renewal that was planned, but the opportunity at hand to serve these souls took priority. "So he began teaching them many things." He addressed their sins with God's law. They weren't so much different than people today. They were guilty of displacing God from the number one position he properly occupies in our hearts and our lives, making themselves and their own desires more important than the Lord. They were guilty of misuse of God's name and neglect of his Word. Like us they revealed their estrangement from the Lord in their treatment of others, dishonoring those in authority or not helping to protect life. There was failure to be a loving spouse and honoring marriage. They were

guilty of greed and misuse of property, stealing and acting selfishly. Gossip and slander crossed their lips while too little was said when there was need to defend the reputation of others. They had covetous hearts. To such guilty sinners Jesus brought the gospel of full and free forgiveness for their mountainous burden of sin. He brought rest for troubled souls.

He could proclaim that forgiveness because of the work he would do, dying on the cross for all those sins by his hearers then and now. His death would pay for every single sin ever committed and he would rise again in demonstration of his victory. Jesus also spent his entire earthly existence keeping God's commandments (that we broke) to achieve the righteousness which the law demanded. By his life and his death, which we call his active and passive obedience, he would win eternal salvation for the world.

That work brings us greater rest than a vacation. The greatest rest comes in eternal life in heaven. There we will enjoy rest from all the troubles and sorrows of life now, freedom from the illnesses and hurts of life, both emotional and physical. What about rest from work? Since Adam and Eve had a job to do in the original perfect world, that might continue but it would not be difficult. We will no longer have to eat by the sweat of our brow.

You and I have all these blessings through Jesus. I hope he would not view the people gathering here at St. John as sheep without a shepherd. Yes, you lack a fulltime, permanent caretaker for your souls, but you do have the message of Jesus offered to you regularly, with more activities resuming after summer. Use your opportunities. Do not take a break or a vacation from God. The Third Commandment called for physical rest for a day each week, but it was a day to gather around God's Word. The message they received brought rest for troubled souls. We have that message available many days, really, every day. Hear and believe it. As you are renewed through the gospel you will also be ready to share it.

You may need to rest after that work like the apostles, but then continue eagerly to tell the good news of Jesus because of the value He brings to others. There still are many like sheep without a shepherd, a disastrous condition for defenseless animals and even more tragic when we are talking about souls and their eternal welfare. Hear and share the Savior's invitation to come for rest. Rejoice in his forgiveness and look forward to the eternal rest he has won for you and the world.