

Sermon for July 29, 2012 – The 9th Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 6:30-34

Theme: Our Shepherd gives us rest

- 1) *Rest from the world.*
- 2) *Rest for the world.*

³⁰ *The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.* ³¹ *Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."* ³² *So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.* ³³ *But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.* ³⁴ *When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.*

No one can work continuously without resting. God created us that way. If someone were to try, they would ruin their health - let alone their sanity.

But what exactly is rest and what purpose does it serve? I will tell you what rest isn't - it isn't work, and worry. It isn't a hobby you stress over, or a second job trying to get the luxuries you want. Rest is the cessation of work. It is being at peace.

Earthly rest is not permanent. Its purpose is to revitalize us for further work.

Today we will see this truth played out in the lives of the disciples, and learn what proper rest is, under the theme: **Our Shepherd gives us rest.** 1) *Rest from the world.* 2) *Rest for the world.*

Part One: Rest From the World.

Jesus sent out his twelve disciples to preach in the surrounding towns and villages. You could almost picture this time as their "vicar-year" - getting some practical mission experience as apostles before Jesus would send them out after his ascension.

Mark writes: *The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.*

The disciples had a lot to talk about - both good and bad. The good: how powerful and effective God's Word is in calling people to faith. They saw demons flee and hardened hearts melt in repentance. They saw the joy the Gospel brought others as they heralded the arrival of the kingdom of heaven and the forgiveness of sins. But their short ministry wasn't all a bed of roses. Many people also rejected their message. We can imagine the Jewish authorities sent spies to watch and question them. And then there was the tragic news that Herod beheaded Jesus' faithful forerunner: John the Baptist. There was a lot that the disciples needed to get off their chest, but. . . *because so many people were coming and going ... they did not even have a chance to eat.*

Jesus realized that the situation was not good. Yes, many people needed to hear the Gospel, but the disciples needed rest. They needed time to get all their joys and concerns off their chest. They needed food and sleep. They needed time alone with Jesus.

So he said to them, *"Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."* *So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.*

The disciples got the rest they needed. We know from John 6 that - even though the crowds may have arrived before Jesus did, they didn't start gathering around him until he had a little time with his disciples. During this time the 12 were able to relax and process everything they had experienced. What a blessed and needed rest this was!.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we too - like the disciples - need rest. There is so much going on in our lives and in the world around us. There are joys and trials in our families, work, and community. The news reports tragedies of crime, war and disaster. There is so much information and so many experiences that our minds need to process from a spiritual point of view. How can we do it? By taking time to rest with Jesus every day and every week.

Jesus said: "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*" (Matthew 11:28-29). Accept Jesus invitation to rest. Find a private place - away from every distraction. Like the disciples lay everything before the LORD in prayer: your joys and sorrows; your triumphs and trials. Tell him your concerns for your loved ones and others in the world. Tell him everything that is on your heart - actually go farther than that. Mine out everything that is deep in your heart and lay it before him. Confess your sins - especially the ones you are ashamed to admit to anyone else. Confess your doubts - even the ones you feel God might find especially offensive. Lay it all before Jesus in prayer. And then look to the cross to find rest.

When I say look to the cross, I am not talking about a physical cross hanging on a wall (although that could serve as a good visual reminder). I am talking about going into Scripture by recalling what Jesus did for you on the cross. Remember all his wonderful promises of forgiveness, love and help. This is what I mean when I say, "Look at the cross"; for when you look at the cross through the eyes of faith, you will receive rest. You will hear Jesus assure you that your sins are forgiven. He will comfort and instruct you. You will be renewed and ready fight the good fight and live to the glory of God.

Sadly, we often don't see daily devotion and weekly worship as the rest they truly are. Sometimes we think worship is something that prevents us from truly relaxing. Our morning devotions might interfere with extra sleep. Sunday services get in the way of fishing, hunting or other leisure time we want to have. We often view worship as something we "have to do," another responsibility to fulfill.

Brothers and sisters, we won't receive rest if we view devotions as a burden. There is no peace for the person ticking off the minutes of worship so he can be somewhere else. If we find ourselves doing this - and who of us can claim that we haven't - maybe we should spend a little time in the God's law and see how wretched and in need of Christ we truly are. Maybe we should look in Scripture and see the very real damnation our sins have earned. Why? Because only those who feel sin's heavy burden will find rest in Christ. Only those who hunger for righteousness will find food for the soul. Only those who thirst for forgiveness will be refreshed by the water of life. Our Shepherd offers us rest - rest from the world as we pray and meditate on his promises. May He lead us to acknowledge this and view our time in the Word as precious.

Part Two: Rest for the world.

The crowds did not leave Jesus and his disciples alone. We read: *But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.*

How rude. Couldn't the people just give Jesus and the disciples a break - especially considering the news of John the Baptist's death? No, they were compelled to search for him.

And what was Jesus' reaction when his proposed rest was rudely interrupted by the crowd? *He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.*

Even though they would later reject him (cf. John 6), Jesus doesn't begrudge their coming. He doesn't curse them under his breath for ruining his rest with his disciples. His Savior's heart felt only the deepest pity for the crowd. They were as sheep without shepherds. In all the synagogues of Galilee there were rabbis and scribes, but the spiritual leadership they offered these people brought neither rest nor peace. Their leaders pointed them to themselves and their work for salvation. This crowd was harassed and helpless, and so the great Friend of sinners forgot His own need of rest, and *began teaching them many things* regarding their salvation.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, God wants you to have the same heart for your community, country and world that Jesus had for the crowd. Look around you. There are so many people who are harassed and helpless. Like the crowd in Jesus'

day, they are taught to look to themselves and their works for salvation. Even though they do not know it, they are in dire need of a Savior - not a political or economic one, but a Savior from sin. They are in need of Jesus and the rest he offers through faith.

And so, in compassion, share the rest you yourself received from Jesus with others. Take the opportunities God gives you to confess him to your family and friends. Many of them - those who don't know Christ - are wearied and burdened. They might not admit it, but this is their spiritual reality. If you don't share Christ with them, how will they ever know true forgiveness and rest in God?

And look beyond your family and community to the places you cannot go. Look at how many people in our nation are weary and burdened. Look at how many people in our world are without hope. They too need your compassion to give them rest.

But how can we share Jesus rest with them when they live so far away? First of all we can show our compassion by praying for them. Then we can support the mission work of our synod with our offerings, so that missionaries can be sent to those places where we cannot go. This is how Jesus works through us to offer his peace and forgiveness to the world.

What a wonderful, compassionate Shepherd we have. When we are hopelessly burdened and stressed, he offers us his back onto which we can lay our heavy load. He carries our concerns just as he carried our sins and deals with them. And when we have been refreshed through his promises and forgiveness, may we labor for the Gospel and share the rest we received with the multitude that surrounds us, with those who desperately need Jesus. Amen.