

*The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.* <sup>31</sup> *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.”*

<sup>32</sup> *So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.* <sup>33</sup> *But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.* <sup>34</sup> *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. (Mark 6:30-34)*

## Jesus Gives us Rest

Everybody needs a vacation sometimes, don't you think? I took vacation last week, and it was great to get away for a little while. We all need to recharge our batteries and whether you do it by going up north and or by traveling cross country or just by staying home and getting at those projects you've been wanting to take care of, rest is a basic human need. Most studies indicate that people perform better when they get enough rest, both in terms of sleep at night and in terms of taking a break from their responsibilities. This morning we see Jesus recognizing and acting on that basic human need for his disciples. In love, Jesus takes the initiative to make sure that his disciples and his people are getting the rest they need. What he did for them, he does for us. **Jesus gives us rest.**

### I.

When our gospel lesson begins, the disciples have just returned from their first experience of preaching the gospel on their own. Jesus had sent them out to preach and Mark says, **“The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.”** This is one of only two times that Mark calls these men “apostles.” That word literally means someone who is sent on a mission. On this occasion, they were beginning that special work that Jesus called them to do. You can imagine that they were both very excited and also, probably, a little worn out. Then, Mark tells us that so many people came to them that they didn't even have a chance to eat. So they jumped from one exciting but also exhausting situation to another without so much as a break for lunch. Nobody can keep up a pace like that. So Jesus said, **“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”**

Burnout is real, even in the ministry. In a sinful world, it's easy for stress and responsibility to get the better of us. Even if you love your job, that's still true. Just like the solution to being hungry is eating, we all need rest sometimes. That's true for us in the ministry and it's true for you in the pew. It's true for your jobs and your family responsibilities and even for the work that you do for your congregation. Jesus provided that break for his disciples. He invited them to come to a quiet place and rest. He loaded them into a boat and they set out across the Sea of Galilee.

But little did the disciples know that their entire vacation would consist of that one boat ride. As soon as they landed, the crowds were all over them again. They didn't get a week up north or a trip back to visit family and catch up with old friends. They got one boat ride and then it was back to work. Yet, the Bible does not record any grumbling about that. Instead, it records the reason why Jesus cut their vacation short: **“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.”** The crowd needed rest, too. But not physical rest. The Holy Spirit doesn't say one word about their physical state, even though he does say that the people who saw him leaving in the boat ran on foot around the shore of the lake so that they could be there when he landed. Even after all that exertion, Jesus deals with their spiritual needs. Mark tells us that he taught them many things. That was the rest Jesus offered.

What is real spiritual rest? It's not a day off. Spiritual rest is the relief that God gives our hearts when we hear his word. We need spiritual rest every day that our heart lives in a sinful world. Rest comes to sinners when they hear about God's love. Rest comes to sinners when they hear that God knows their sin and their guilt and that he sent his Son to die and rise and take that guilt away. Rest comes to sinners when they hear that God knows how hard life is here and he has a plan for us. He listens to our prayers. He guards and protects us and

even takes hurts and hardship away. He only allows suffering to come when it serves his purpose of bringing us home to heaven. All that is what Jesus offered that crowd that day.

In fact, Jesus put that spiritual rest first. He put it ahead of his disciples' need for a vacation. He put it ahead of the physical weariness of the people who had run around the lake and from the local towns to see him. He did that on purpose to teach us that the most important part of our lives is our spiritual rest. If we are spiritually refreshed and renewed, we can face the rest of what this life throws at us. But if we are spiritually starved and exhausted, then we can't even begin to face the simplest problems and difficulties of this life. That's true, because the person who is spiritually refreshed understands where true strength comes from. It doesn't come from deep inside me somewhere. It doesn't come from looking into your heart and finding your true self. Only weakness and arrogance and despair come from deep inside us. True strength comes from Jesus. It comes from leaning on him and knowing that he is doing what is best for us. When we rest our souls in his love and in his word, then we have the faith that trusts in him and stands up to everything. But when we exhaust and starve our faith, we don't realize where strength really comes from. We think that it's all up to us. We dig deep and we find nothing. And we fail.

Jesus put spiritual needs first, always. Do we? When you go on vacation this summer, are you going to make time for Christ? Will you get to church on Sunday? Will you take the time to look up the local WELS congregations on the synod website or stop by my office and get the contact information? Or will you figure that being on vacation means you don't have to go to church either? We need spiritual rest when we're on vacation, too. In fact, I sometimes wonder if we think that going to church is just an obligation we have to fulfill when our kids are in Lutheran elementary school. Our teachers rightly emphasize church attendance all year long. But do we walk away from those conversations thinking, "I'll be so glad when summer comes and we don't have to do that anymore?" Maybe you think that no one would actually think that. But then, why is our summer church attendance so bad? Do we think that we need a vacation from church? A rest from getting spiritual rest?

That kind of thinking comes from the devil. All thoughts that we have more important things to do than hear the word of God are sin. We're not only robbing ourselves of the rest that Jesus wants to give us, we're treating his love with contempt. For that we deserve nothing but death and hell. But that's exactly why Jesus came into this world: to rescue us from death and hell. He came because we sinners in a sinful world get so confused and lost on this issue. He came because left to ourselves, we would never trust in him. We would always believe that we could do it on our own and wind up in hell. So he came and he died for all that sin. He paid for all that's wrong with our hearts, for all the times we passed up his gift of spiritual rest. He died and he paid because so often we have treated his word and his love with contempt. Then he rose and he announced that we are free. All our sin is gone. We have eternal life with him.

That message is what church is all about. Jesus made his disciples cut short their vacation so that they could see exactly what he was calling them to do. The holy ministry exists for one purpose only: to give spiritual rest. My job is to give you a vacation from sin and guilt and worry. How can I do that? There's only one way: by pointing you to Christ. **Jesus gives us rest for our souls.**

## II.

Mark said that Jesus had compassion on the crowd because they were like sheep without a shepherd. The Greek word that Mark uses here for "had compassion" literally means that he felt it in his gut. These people weren't just another "case" for him to deal with. This wasn't just an interesting professional problem. When Jesus saw these people who desperately needed the rest only he could provide, he was moved to help them. That attitude of love is the key to all that we trust in. Jesus has compassion on us. He sees us in all our needs and in all our hurts and because he loves us – because he feels it in his gut – he is moved to help us.

What did he see on that day? Mark says that the crowd was like sheep without a shepherd. To us city folk, that might not be as clear a picture as it was to Mark and his largely agricultural people. But I think we can understand it if we know a few things about sheep. Sheep are stupid. They don't think much about what's going on around them. They're very focused on their needs and desires. They also have no real defenses. Sheep don't have large claws or fangs to defend themselves. They aren't like deer who can run away like lightning and leap over fences and escape. Sheep are small and fat and their only defense is to crowd together and baa. And because they are so stupid, they tend to wander off after what looks like a particularly tasty tuft of grass, even if it means they're leaving the flock and exposing themselves to danger.

There are no wild sheep. They need a shepherd. Without a shepherd to lead them to green pastures and quiet waters, without a shepherd to defend them from predators and keep them together in a flock and rescue them when they're hurt or lost, sheep don't stand a chance. What Jesus saw was a flock of spiritual sheep. That's how the Bible describes us all. We simply don't have the power or the smarts we think we have. We live in a world that's full of danger and hardship. Think of all the difficulties out there: illness and financial disaster, family problems and crime, car accidents and lost jobs. There are so many things that can hit us and so often, we don't see it coming, even when we should have.

In addition to all that "life" stuff, there's the "devil" stuff. The devil hates us. He wants to destroy our faith. He loves it when we suffer and he makes our lives difficult because he wants us to give up on God. And he tempts us. He's really good at it. He tempts us to be cruel to each other, to indulge our sinful desires, to figure we've heard enough of God's word, so we don't need to go back to church. Then when he gets us to sin, he hits us with despair. Why should God forgive you? If we resist the temptation, he hits us with pride. Man, are you a good Christian. You're doing great. Notice, with both approaches, he leads us away from Christ to ourselves, to our pride or our guilt.

Without a shepherd, without Christ, we would be helpless. We would all die and spend eternity in hell. But Jesus has compassion on us. He sees us down here, fumbling around in our sin, helpless before the devil, and he's moved to rescue us. So he comes to us in the Word and in baptism and in communion and tells us that he died and he rose to take all our sins away. When he does that, he reaches into our hearts and he strengthens our faith. He gives us new hope and new power to resist the devil. He comes to us in the temptation to despair and he tells that he does love us and we do belong to him in spite of those terrible sins we're guilty of. He comes to us when we think we are doing so well and are such an example to the flock, and he cuts the legs out from under our pride by hammering us with the law. And then he returns in love and forgives us. He builds us up every day until we reach heaven. And he deals with all the hardships, with all the hurt and fear, with all the worry of this life, by promising that he will watch over us. Every good and every bad thing that happens to us, he will use to bring us home to heaven. There we will be free from all harm and danger, all sin and guilt forever. He does all that because he loves us. **Jesus gives us rest in his love.**

My friends, take a vacation this summer. Take time off from work and responsibility and recharge your batteries. We all need that. But even more, take a vacation from sin and guilt and fear. Take a vacation from all that's wrong with this life. Come and rest in the love and forgiveness and promises of Christ. That's what you need most of all. Amen.