

“Rest” Lenten Devotional
St. James UMC - Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Some have said “social distancing” over the next several weeks is the perfect time to be more productive than ever. With no social lives and less people using their time to commute to work, I have seen articles online discussing how to use this season of being stuck at home to get more than usual done at (tele)work, and homeschool your children, and deep clean your house, and stock up on food and supplies, and read all these books, and start a blog putting out your own content, and... the list goes on.

I suffered from being far too “productive” my junior year of college. The more involved I was, the more I enjoyed my college experience, so by the time I was in the second semester of my junior year, I was involved in about ten extracurriculars on top of being a full-time student and working part-time. In being determined to have an amazing college experience, I had bitten off more than I could chew. I had forgotten what resting felt like.

Our Scripture for this devotional comes from Mark 6:30-34, 53-56: ³⁰ *The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³²And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴As Jesus 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... ⁵³When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized Jesus, ⁵⁵and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.”*

The passage begins with Jesus and his disciples regrouping after they have all been teaching and healing for a long time. Jesus saw that his disciples were tired and that they needed to rest to take care of their hunger, thirst, and need for downtime. They also needed time with Jesus, time with one another, and time with God the Father. So, amidst the compassion Jesus had for the crowds of thousands, amidst teaching and feeding and healing, Jesus telling his disciples to *rest* was an act of compassion, too. Jesus, understanding that rest is holy and necessary, told his disciples, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.”

In today’s fast-paced world, resting can be hard when being busy is viewed as a sign of success. In the book *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, Pete Scazzero writes, “We admire people who are able to accomplish so much in so little time... And if we aren’t busy, we feel guilty that we waste time and are not productive.”

Resting might also be hard for other reasons. Natural caregivers or perfectionists can find it hard to justify resting before they’re exhausted. *Why put off until tomorrow what we can do today? Why take time for ourselves when we could put our energy to use taking care of someone else?* But rest is not indulgent. It is necessary, and part of our joyful life as God’s

creation! Genesis 2:2 says, *“So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.”* Whether or not God *needed* that rest, God chose to rest on that seventh day. God saw that rest was good: rest added to the completeness of creation. The seventh day, when God rests from the work of creation, is a sacred thing. God’s people are reminded of this with the 3rd of the Ten Commandments: *“Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy... For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.”*

One thing I’m learning about ministry is that “There’s always tomorrow.” This can be interpreted a number of ways- there is always more to be done, there is always a never ending list of things to do and people to see... yet it also means there is always another chance to improve and deepen relationships... to extend grace... to correct a mistake. There does come a point when we know- when we can trust- that we have done all we can do for the day, and know that there is always tomorrow.

Without rest, we tend towards the ways of the world- greed, anger, restlessness, impatience, mistrust, control. Jesus specifically tells his disciples to spend time “in a deserted place-” away from the distractions and pressures of the world, so that they can find refreshment both physically and spiritually. When we stop and re-center ourselves, we are better equipped to see God in the world around us and hear God’s voice leading us and guiding us. It brings us closer to God, emerging more ready to be faithful in our discipleship.

Being productive is important, and the internet will have you know there are plenty of things to do if you happen to get bored before we resume life as usual. However, rest is just as important as productivity, if not moreso, as rest gives us the strength and focus to be productive when it is time. Jesus’ invitation to his disciples remains the same for us today: “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.”