

Proper 11B
Jeremiah 23:1-6
Psalm 23
Mark 6:30-34, 53-56
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July 18, 2021

Have you ever noticed how often children's books explain theological truths or reflect bible stories that make them more easily understood? I think that is because of their simplicity and our ability to connect the stories in those books to our everyday lives. Books like Horton Hears a Who, Stone Soup, The Runaway Bunny, and a whole slew of others can teach us a lot about Christian living and our bible stories. There is a children's book by Jill Murphy entitled *Five Minutes Peace* that reminds a lot of today's Gospel reading.

Five Minutes Peace tells the story of a mother elephant trying to find five minutes of alone time away from her three rambunctious children. It begins with a picture of her standing in her bathrobe with curlers in the few hairs on her head and holding a cup of coffee as she looks with dismay at her children in the kitchen. The story begins, "The children were having breakfast. This was not a pleasant sight." So, she makes a cup of tea, grabs the morning paper, and attempts to sneak away to the bathroom for five minutes of peace. She closes the bathroom door and sinks into a hot bubble bath. She closes her eyes and begins to relax. But her children follow her to the bathroom. One by one the kids barge into the bathroom wanting to show her something. Pretty soon she gives up on relaxing in a bath, dries off leaving the children playing in her bubble bath, and heads to the kitchen still trying to find five minutes of peace. In the final page, we see her sitting at the kitchen table reading the paper as the story ends, "And off she went downstairs, where she had three minutes and forty-five seconds of peace before they all came to join her."

Three minutes and forty-five seconds of peace is probably all Jesus and His disciples had before the crowds descended upon them once more. Even though Jesus must be exhausted, He continues teaching and healing because of His compassion and love for the children of God. There are times when I think that Jesus' full-blown anger and tossing tables in the temple was as much about compassion fatigue as it was about the misuse of God's house.

All God's children, including Jesus, need to rest. Without rest, we crash and burn. When we are over tired, when we are emotionally and physically spent, we say things we don't mean and do things that we wouldn't otherwise do. Jesus took one look at His haggard disciples and said, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."

With all of our scripture readings drilling home the image of the shepherd, you may be wondering why I am focusing on one single line that appears to have nothing to do with our call to Christian living. First and foremost, is that it has everything to do with Christian living. Taking time to rest is a way to show love for yourself. When Jesus said to “love God and love your neighbor as yourself”, we tend to forget that this means we must first love ourselves. Rest is self-care which is a way of showing love.

Like Jesus, we have a lot that depends on us, and our time is overscheduled. Our children have the same problem, though we often fail to recognize the stress our children are under to achieve and succeed at all costs. Jesus understood the need to rest. Think of how often He went off alone to pray. During those times, he unplugged from the world so that he could just be. Those were His times of Sabbath.

In our culture Sabbath has become a foreign concept. Sabbath is a time of rest. Even God took a day of rest after creating the universe and all that it is in it. Sabbath doesn't have to be on Sunday; it certainly isn't for clergy or even many church members. Clergy learn to carve out Sabbath, a time for rest, wherever we can between demands for our time. So can you. Believe me, I know it is hard to rest. As one person put it, “If I rest, I'll rust.” But the thing is we aren't the Tin Man. We won't rust if we stop moving and rest. What we will do is recharge and rejuvenate. Sabbath is a time of rest, but it is also a time of delight and joy.

Rest doesn't mean sleep, for you can sleep without feeling rested. It also doesn't mean just sitting on the couch binge watching Netflix, though sometimes that is a form of rest. Rest or Sabbath is anything that allows our minds to still and connect with God in some way. There are many ways to rest. For example, rest for me often involves nature in some way where I see the beauty and wonder of God all around me. But I also find rest when kneading bread dough or doing any repetitive task that frees my mind from the cares and worries of life allowing me to just be one with God.

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters. He revives my soul”- Psalm 23:1-3a. Most of us have no experience to fully understand what a Shepherd does for their sheep. Shepherds keep the sheep safe. Shepherds allow the sheep to rest without being on constant alert. If they need a great grazing spot or need to know if a stream is safe to cross, they can trust the shepherd to lead them along the right paths. If they get scared or anxious, it is the voice of the shepherd that calms them allowing them to return to the work at hand.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He calls to us, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” This is an invitation to Sabbath. A time to turn our worries and cares over to Jesus, trusting that he will care for us so that we can rest. Obligations can wait. Time for self-care, rejuvenation, and reviving of the soul cannot. Sabbath is a sacred time. The time we take to rest is essential to our well-being so that we can love our neighbors, so that we can love God, and so that we go out into the world to do the work that Christ has given us to do.

Rest may be counter-cultural but so are most aspects of Christian living. As followers of Christ, our lives are counter-cultural. We are called to love those that the world says are unlovable. We

are called to feed the hungry without judgement of their circumstances. We are called to fight for justice and freedom for all people regardless of the world's view of their skin color or life choices. Yes, we are called to work in the name of Christ, but we are also called to rest.

Even though you may want long periods of rest, you may only get three minutes and forty-five seconds of rest like the mother elephant in the story *Five Minutes Peace*. Sometimes, that can be enough to revive your soul, to give you a new outlook, and let you move through your day. Rest and don't feel guilty about it. Relax into the arms of the Good Shepherd. Let His voice calm you. Let His voice erase your guilt for taking time to rest. Let His voice revive your soul.

Jesus calls to us all, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."

Amen