

*Jesus said to his disciples,  
"Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."  
In the name of God, Creator, Liberator and Sustainer. Amen.*

The disciples had to be worn out. Jesus had sent them out two by two with only the tunic on their back, the sandals on their feet and a stick. They preached their hearts out, they taught everything they knew, they healed as many as they could and cast out every demon that popped up. Their feet hurt and they had to smell. Then Jesus invited them to come away with him and rest for a while.

But our gospel lesson this morning skips some verses. There was more work to do on the way to that deserted place. People had followed them, and all of the sudden they were faced with 5000 hungry people to feed before their vacation could even begin. (Sometimes one does wonder if vacation is worth it when you've got to do all the work that's necessary to prepare to leave.) Finally they got on the boat and Jesus was supposed to meet them on the other side after he had said a few prayers by himself. Low and behold they had one more storm on the waters to endure. Eventually Jesus walked to them on the water and calmed the storm. Finally they were anchored and ready for some serious R&R, but of course there were more people. There is always work left to do in the vineyard. But for now they must try to get some sleep.

Most of us know what they kind of exhaustion is all about. Turns out that since 2001, the number of people reporting sleep problems has increased 13%. Two out of every ten Americans sleep less than six hours a night. People sleeping too few hours report being too tired to work efficiently, to exercise or to eat healthy. Spending an average of nearly 4.5 hours each week doing additional work from home on top of a 9.5 hour average workday, Americans are working more and are trying to cope with the resulting daytime sleepiness. In fact, 63 percent state they are very likely to just accept their sleepiness and keep going, while 32 percent are very likely to use caffeinated beverages when they are sleepy during the day and more than half (54%) are at least somewhat likely to use their weekends to try to catch up on sleep.<sup>1</sup>

So a much wiser, older and sometimes sleep-deprived clergy friend of mine was excited on Tuesday when I told her what the gospel lesson was for this Sunday. "Oh good! That's easy. You can preach about Sabbath time." Sabbath from the Hebrew verb shabbath, meaning "to rest from labour", the day of rest. I laughed out loud.

I resisted writing a sermon on that theme for five days, even losing sleep over it a few nights, trying my hardest to write another sermon. I stayed up many hours watching the coverage of The General Convention in Anaheim, California. I was excited about all of the work being done there and the way all of our bishops and deputies worshiped and prayed together to advance the kingdom of God.

They passed legislation that continues to break down the barriers that make some minorities feel excluded from the love and abounding grace of God. Resolutions were passed that acknowledge that God has called and may call any individual in the church to any ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church. We reaffirmed the continued participation of the Episcopal Church in the Anglican Communion and at the same time we resolved to collect and develop theological resources and liturgies of blessing for same-gender holy unions, to be presented to the next General Convention. In addition, all bishops, particularly those in dioceses within civil jurisdictions where same-gender marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships are legal, may provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this Church. However, honoring the theological diversity of this Church, no bishop or other member of the clergy shall be compelled to authorize or officiate at such liturgies. The Episcopal Church also acknowledges that the Anglican Communion is not of one mind on any these matters, nor are we here at St. Margaret's. There are both those of us here this morning will benefit greatly from these resolutions and those who will be challenged by them.

I wanted to preach a great justice sermon about all of that and about the other resolutions that charge us to continue our mission work at home and abroad. That sermon goes well with the Ephesians reading this morning as we hear of how we are all brought together into one body in Christ Jesus. Those who were once aliens and strangers are now the citizens and saints and members of the household of God. In the Body of Christ, in the church, we are all joined together, and we grow into a holy temple in the Lord.

We bring our differences to the altar and set them down before God. Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God reconciles our differences and breaks down the barriers in society that tear us apart. God wipes away our fears in the hope of the Resurrection. We rejoice in the promise of life everlasting when we know we will all be seated at one table sharing one Bread and one Body. God calls us to see the face of Christ in our neighbor and to talk to them and embrace each other in love no matter what our opinions may be. And in those grace filled moments when we join hands and sing, we realize that we “are (being) built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God” built on The Church’s One Foundation, Jesus Christ her Lord.

That was the sermon I wanted to preach. But the gospel of Mark kept speaking in a louder voice to me through the voice of the Holy Spirit and my wise colleague. Now granted, I know that’s partly because they both know I’m more of a Martha than a Mary. I’d rather be busy and constructive than restful and contemplative. Neither are wrong. We need both and. That is after all what being an Anglican means.

And so it is summer, and it’s time to rest a bit from our labors. Jesus’ good advice says that it’s time to come away with him and have a little quiet time to reflect on where we have been and where we are going. We have to stop running on empty and find those things that bring us new life and renewed energy and vigor to do the work we are called to do in our lives and in this church community.

But many of us are resistant to Jesus’ kind invitation. I read somewhere that in China the polite answer to the question of “How are you?” is to say, “I am very busy, thank you.” Unfortunately, too many of us have adopted that quick response. No longer is that response a status symbol, but it is becoming a sign to the world that our lives are out of balance. Perhaps it’s a defense mechanism or a way to prove to the world that we have value and that we are accomplishing many things. We easily come to believe that those many things will bring our salvation.

To take Sabbath time is good advice. But the Good News is that Jesus invites us into it. “Our Lord knows what we need, even when we do not. When we gather around him, we may want to tell him all the things we have done and all the things we have taught others. We hold up before him our busyness and our weariness as objects worthy of praise and reward. We tell him that we have been so busy that we haven’t even had time to eat. And we say to ourselves, surely all these things will prove how important and valuable we are.”<sup>ii</sup>

“And our gracious Lord looks past all our illusions and he doesn’t even mention them, because if he did, he would have to remind us that all that we are and all that we do are gifts from God in the first place. Rather, he looks into our hearts and sees what we truly desire, what we truly need. He makes us lie down in green pastures and leads us beside the still waters and restores our souls.”<sup>iii</sup>

So come away with Jesus, even if for just a short nap. You deserve it. Leave those things behind that are done and left undone. The busy storms of our lives will come. But there has never been a storm that did not end. And whenever the storm does end, a new atmosphere always emerges. It is happening in The Episcopal Church and here at St. Margaret’s. Our love and affection for one another and God’s abundant grace will overwhelm the difference between us. That grace will heal that tug of war between doing and simply being.

We long for the promise of the healing of that division and of many others. We are not there yet, but we have glimpses of it in our communities and in our relationships, whatever they may be. And when we get there, “Almighty God, who after the creation of the world rested from all works and sanctified a day of rest for all creatures: will put away all our earthly anxieties. Then we will be duly prepared for the service of God’s sanctuary, and our rest here upon earth will be a preparation for the eternal rest promised to God’s people in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”<sup>iv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)

<sup>ii</sup> -- The Rev. Dr. Joseph S. Pagano is rector of Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Baltimore, MD. He received a Ph.D. in theology from Marquette University in Milwaukee, WI.

[http://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons\\_that\\_work\\_112044\\_ENG\\_HTM.htm](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons_that_work_112044_ENG_HTM.htm)

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>iv</sup> Collect for Saturday: (Book of Common Prayer, page 97)