

Gimme a Break!

Rev. Nancy Willet
Mark 6: 30-34; 53-56

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Summer is here! The kids are out of school, teachers have a break for a couple of months, and we all just sort of slow down with the heat, don't we? Summers are the traditional time when folks take vacations. They take time to rest, to renew and refresh—to get away from it all. I have talked to several people in our congregation that have plans for a summer vacation. How many of you here have taken or plan to take a vacation this summer?

You know, there are many pastors that bemoan summertime because attendance is down and that means financial giving is down, and while that is a true statement, I think summertime, and more importantly vacation time is important in the life of a Christian. Getting away from it all is a good thing and something that is becoming scarcer and scarcer in many people's lives.

Americans in particular, are getting worse and worse about taking vacation time. I read that we take only an average of just over two weeks a year vacation. When you think about 10 days of rest out of 350-something, that really is not very much. We Americans take less time off than many other industrialized nations. In Germany, they enjoy six weeks of vacation a year. In France, they enjoy just over five weeks a year. And what is surprising about this is that productivity of the French or the Germans is not really much lower than that of the United States. We Americans seem to vacation less, play less, volunteer less, and join groups less. We eat more fast food and we grow

less healthy. In our text for today, Jesus has something to say about taking time off and about getting away from our usual routines.

The disciples had just gotten back from their first mission out after being commissioned. They were excited to tell Jesus about all they had done and all they had taught. But Jesus could tell they were tired. Even if it had been the work of the Lord, they were probably worn out. So, Jesus told them to come away to a deserted place and rest awhile. They told him they didn't even have leisure to eat.

You'll have to think a little bit with me now about how meals were eaten in the Mediterranean in biblical times. Meals were more than just nourishment—they were social times. They were occasions in which friends and families would gather together and enjoy time with each other, sharing the blessings of their lives and probably sharing the sorrows as well. Mealtimes were a time to strengthen the bonds of friendship and family.

So, when they told Jesus they didn't even have the leisure to eat, he understood that there was a great need of rest and renewal in their lives. Since they had been away from Jesus for a period of time. It was important that they share a meal together and strengthen their bond once more—with each other and with Jesus.

He told them to come away to a deserted place by themselves. In biblical times, the desert or wilderness as it is sometimes called, was not necessarily a desert, like we think of it—a hot, arid climate being the most

descriptive notion. It could be, of course. But more often, the desert described a place where there were not many people—an isolated, lonely place.

According to Larry Broding, “deserted places were the homes of evil and danger.” Today in our lives, we often times seek personal space—a space to be alone, but the Jews had no conception of that notion. The people banded together in small hamlets and villages scattered around the countryside for protection and survival, and if you were not with these other people, you were in the desert and at risk.

So for Jesus to suggest that his apostles come to a deserted place was quite a statement. Why, the town people must’ve thought, would Jesus want to take his followers to the place where evil and danger lurked?

Well, do you remember the story when Jesus was tempted in the desert by Satan at the beginning of his ministry? Jesus proved then that he even had authority over Satan, and there was no place in creation that God was not. With Christ at our sides, no matter where we are is a good place. The kingdom of God is everywhere.

The point Jesus was making to his disciples was that we all live in what William Barclay called “the rhythm of the Christian life. We all need to alternate meeting with God in the desert and serving humanity in the marketplace.”

The 4th Commandment, from our Old Testament reading in Exodus, was to *remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy*. Maybe Christ was giving a reminder of this commandment to his disciples that day to stop, take a rest.

I believe we are being given the same reminder of that commandment today as well.

You know, since I have come here, Stan has been putting the sermon titles on the sign out front for me each Monday. That means I have to come up with a sermon title before I have written the sermon. It usually works out ok, but I think this week's sermon really ought to be titled "Take a Break!" or "Rest Stop Ahead—Next Exit," instead of "Gimme a break!" That would fit much better.

The word "Sabbath," from the 4th commandment and the word Jesus used for rest both convey a sense of to stop and desist—to cease from whatever you are doing, and to stop yourself from doing so much. This may seem like one of the easier commands we have been given, but I'm not too sure it is.

Some of the most faithful disciples I know seem to be the busiest people I know. They are always serving on this board or that board. They are making a dish to take to someone coming home from the hospital, or taking a friend to a doctor's appointment. Don't get me wrong—these are all things we have also been commanded to do—to serve and love our neighbor as ourselves.

We stress these commandments all the time in church—love the poor, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, bear one another's burdens, and good Christian folks obey these commandments and take them seriously. So, why

not stress and take seriously the commandment to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy?

Maybe some of you are like me, and have to work on Sunday. So how do I keep this commandment? Sabbath days or weeks don't have to be on Sundays—that would be impossible for some of us. The point is that we need a balance in our life—like I said early—we need that basic Christian rhythm of work and rest. Jesus commands us to take a break, and for most of us, one hour on Sunday morning probably is not enough!

There is another serious issue here, I believe, as well when we get caught up in the busyness of life. Some of us begin believing that the world will only survive if we do these things we are doing that keep us so busy. Oh, none of us think those exact words, because if we did, we would see the foolishness in them.

But many times, behind all the busyness and the hustle and bustle of our lives there is a deep down motive that says if *I* don't take care of this no one will, or no one can really do this as well as I can, so I would prefer to do it myself.

What we are doing when we get so caught up in our busyness is we are actually saying that **we** control the outcome of the world. That's a pretty powerful statement, isn't it? That's a pretty darn big burden that we needlessly carry around with us everyday.

We declare this to be false every week, though when we stand and recite what we believe in the Apostle's Creed. We say, "*I believe in God the*

Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth...—we are saying that we believe it is **not** up to us to make the world come out right. **THAT** is God's job. God created the world and it wasn't just a once and for all deal. God continues creating and shaping our world everyday. That is good news, folks. We don't *have* to be in control, the world is not going to fall apart if we aren't busy every minute of every day. We can take a break! The world is in God's good and steady hands.

You see, it is really not about how much we accomplish in life, but it is all about our relationship with the Lord. If we spend all our time working and doing, when do we spend holy time with God? When do we allow God to renew and refresh us? When do we listen to what God is trying to say to us?

Remember Lily Tomlin, the comedienne from *Laugh In?* She once said, "the trouble with the rat race is that even if you win, you're still a rat!" Well, I don't want to call us rats, but I think we all tend to get caught up in the rat race at one point of our life or another.

Well the Good News of the Gospel for us today and for always is that Jesus Christ recognizes our tired, weary selves even when we don't realize it in our own bodies. Jesus calls us to the desert with him to renew, refresh, and to strengthen our bond with him.

However, first we are called to **remember** the Sabbath—to **remember** that we are commanded to take a vacation, to take a break from our busy, hectic lives, and to **remember** the world is in the capable, loving hands of our Creator God, who makes all things new each and every day. Amen.