

*Rest up!*

Mark 6.30-34, 53-56

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*Come and find the quiet center in the crowded life we lead.*

That place can be hard to find. Maybe we need a little help.

*Spirit of the living God, fall a-fresh on me;*

*Spirit of the living God, fall a-fresh on me;*

*Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me;*

*Spirit of the living God, fall a-fresh on me.*

This is my prayer in the crowded life I lead because I need a little *re*-freshing, a little *re*-newing, a little *re*-creating.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible comes at the end of Matthew 11, “Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest.” Add to those words the music of Handel and I’m in heaven – which is, of course, exactly the place to be because heaven is pictured as the place of rest, eternal rest, the rest that stretches from the final act of creation in Genesis to the ultimate promise of the Spirit in Revelation. On the seventh day, “God rested,” the creation story says. And at the end of the Bible, in the great struggle between destruction and re-creation, the Spirit says, “they will rest from their labors for their work follows them.” [Rev. 14.13]

Or, as the Rabbi in Chaim Potok’s *The Chosen* says, as he tries to explain death to his son: “A life full of meaning is worthy of rest.” Those words are inscribed on the steps of the columbarium outside, where the ashes of some of our friends and family members are inurned, to remind all of us that rest is our source and our destiny. It’s where we came from and where we are headed.

So the story for this morning from Mark 6 is about rest. And about how hard it can be to find.

### Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

<sup>30</sup>The *apostles* gathered around Jesus ...

Notice that these folks are not ‘disciples’ here but ‘apostles.’ They aren’t just followers anymore, they are the ‘sent ones’ who have been called out into the world to do their own work. The apostles gather around Jesus ...

and told him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup>He 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. <sup>32</sup>And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. <sup>33</sup>Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. <sup>34</sup>As 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.

And then the story moves on to the feeding of the 5000, which is a little ironic because we have just been told that the apostles have been so busy they haven’t even had time to eat. So it’s no wonder they aren’t prepared to feed the 5000 who show up. But that story is for next week. For now, the story continues ...

<sup>53</sup>When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. <sup>54</sup>When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, <sup>55</sup>and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. <sup>56</sup>And 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.

“Rest up!” Jesus is telling these newly minted apostles. “Rest up! Because there is work to do!”

Now I’m always a little nervous talking about a story like this because sometimes it seems like the people who aren’t really doing very much see it as an excuse to do even less. And the people who are already doing too much see it as an indictment to do even more.

So I want to be clear. There is a rhythm here. Rest up because there is work to do.

For those of you who really have this resting thing down, that’s great! But maybe now it’s time to get to work, to find something meaningful to do.

For those who are already doing too much – and only you can be the judge of that – it’s time to rest up.

If you want to be productive in a creative kind of way,  
if you want to do your work with any kind of joy,  
if you want to be the kind of partner that people want to work with, rest up!

Rest up! because there is work to do. There are lonely people and lost people who are like sheep without a shepherd who need help to find their way home.

Rest up! because there is justice to do and peace to be made.

Rest up! because there are opportunities unfolding right in front of us to change the world.

Rest up! because any morning can bring some new challenge that will need your full attention and your most wise action and your most creative imagination.

Rest up! in other words, because, the world is waiting for what the fully rested you can do.

I'll be the first to say that this rhythm is hard to keep.

When UC Berkeley professor of medical humanities, Marilyn McEntyre, writes about this story she says:

*Our rest, if we are to have it, will have to be claimed in the midst of the noise and haste, in spite of others' agendas, and with a clear intention to honor the countercultural priorities our faith encourages.*

This sounds true to me. In order to rest it takes two things.

First, to claim it as a countercultural priority. That is, the culture probably isn't going to give us a lot of help with this one. The culture will tell us that for America to be great again, workers have to work longer hours. The culture will tell us that we can't afford to be too far away from our technology. The culture will guilt us into action and shame us into busyness.

Every week I tell myself that this is the week I'm not going to give up my day off. And then something really important comes along and I do it anyway. And that's on me because it is true that things happen that need my attention. The problem is that, once taken, I don't replace it. I just give up on rest altogether. And the cumulative toll of that isn't pretty.

Rest is, as professor McEntyre says, countercultural. It is an act of social resistance. And, in the Biblical tradition, it is not something only for the privileged but for the poor and for animals and for the earth itself.

I don't find any inspiration in the fact that some of us have to work two and three jobs to make a living. That's not something to inspire us. It's something that should shock us into realizing just how far we have come from what our own Biblical tradition tells us about the sacred meaning of life.

Here's the thing I am discovering about rest. It takes work to do it. I never work as hard or as many hours as I do right before I go on vacation. And, at some point, I say to myself, is this really worth it?

The simple answer is: Yes! If I want to do the meaningful work I've been called to do I have to resist that outer voice and that inner voice that says rest is just not worth doing.

Rest takes work and it takes faith.

Professor McEntyre says that "real rest" is a "function of trust." "I have to trust," she writes, "that our times are in God's hands – not only our ultimate destinies but our evenings and weekends and mealtimes and family times."

This week at our Personnel Commission meeting, Susan Austin did the meditation time at the beginning of the meeting. I don't know what possessed her to read a section from Parker Palmer's book about Dorothy Day, but she did. And it was a Godsend.

The seemingly tireless founder of the Catholic Worker movement talked one day about the “ungrateful poor.” Palmer was shocked. But Dorothy day later explained that doing this sacred meaningful work with people living in poverty was not about earning their gratitude. It was about giving what she had to give.

That story caused Palmer to reflect on his own life.

*When I give something I do not possess, I give a false and dangerous gift, a gift that looks like love but is, in reality loveless – a gift given more from my need to prove myself than from the other’s need to be cared for. That kind of giving is not only loveless but faithless, based on the arrogant and mistaken notion that God has no way of channeling love to the other except through me ... community means trusting that someone else will be available to the person in need.*

Hearing this – especially in the context of a Personnel meeting – grabbed me by the neck and stuck a finger right in my heart.

Rest isn’t just about faith in a loving God. It’s about faith in each other. It’s about believing in you to be that channel of love you are meant to be. It’s about trusting that I am not alone in caring about the world.

So I can take a day off confident that our life together and the world around us isn’t going to fall apart without me on the job. God’s there. And you are there. And I trust both of you to do your own work.

At least I’m trying to learn that.

*“Rest,” professor McEntyre says ...  
is always a teacher:  
God is in charge,  
and we are not indispensable.  
Play is a blessing.  
In laughter we become like little children;  
in sleep we are watched over;  
in lingering over a meal we learn something about love we can't  
learn anywhere else.  
And we are better colleagues [better partners] when we take time  
to commune over a cup of tea.*

I haven't said anything this morning that you don't already know. It's not new news – good news, I hope, but not new. It's as old as creation itself and as hopeful as the promise of the Spirit at the end of days.

Rest is where we came from and rest is where we are headed. It is our source and our destiny. On that final day of your own life, the test of what you have learned about life will be whether you can lie back in the arms of eternity and rest.

As Jesus said to those he had sent out into the world, as the crowds gathered on that other shore already waiting with their needs for healing and their hunger for hope, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.”

Rest up! because we have work to do.

And today, if you hear that voice, do not harden your hearts.

## NOTES

Professor Marilyn McEntyre teaches medical humanities at the University of California, Berkeley. Her article about this text is in the July 8, 2015 issue of *Christian Century*. Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak* (Jossey-Bass, 2000), pp. 48-49.