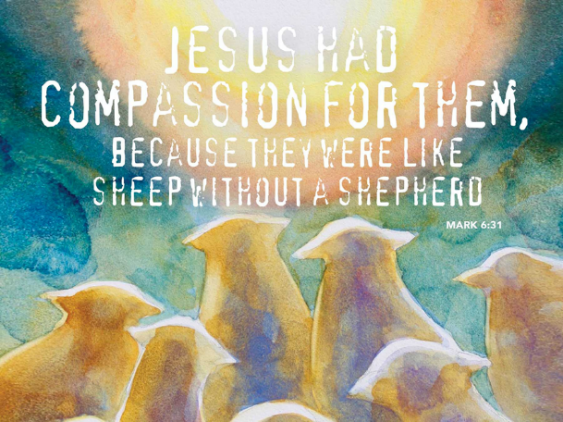
****

**Come Away To A Deserted Place**

**July 22, 2018**

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

Grace and peace to you from God Our Father and from the one who shows us the way, because He is the Way, Jesus Christ Our Lord, amen.

Someone told me a couple of weeks ago that I seem calmer or less anxious than I was when I first started here. I took it as a compliment. I’m pretty sure it was intended as one. Being calmer and less anxious is something I’ve struggled with to be totally honest. I’ve been here at Trinity almost 5 years already and as one frog said to the other frog, “Time sure is fun when you’re having flies…”

Probably part of being less anxious comes from being a bit more secure in this call, but that’s not all of it. Dumping my anxieties and staying cool is a constant battle. I still see a “Spiritual Director” once a month and I can talk about anything that bothers me because I know it’ll stay right there and go no further. Just talking about your troubles and feelings really helps!

I have a couple of tells that I look for that let me know when my anxiety meter is pegging out. The first and biggest thing that usually alerts me that I’ve reached the stage of high anxiety is how I relate to other drivers on the road. If my driving is calm, cool, and collected than my overall psyche usually is as well. On the other hand, if my driving is increasingly aggressive and my hand gestures to the other drivers less than friendly, I know it’s time to get away to my secluded place and do some serious spiritual work. I have other tells that I watch for too. How many of you have ever pushed the Door Closed button on an elevator? I admit I’ve done it a few times. Do you know the average wait time for the elevator door to close is 4 to 6 seconds? That’s right! In less than 6 seconds I can go from mild mannered Pastoral figure heading to or returning from a sick call visitation, to a raving lunatic pushing the door closed button on the elevator so many times the paint on the button comes off on my thumb… When I catch myself pushing the door closed button on the elevator I realize it’s time to take Jesus’ sound advice and get away to a deserted place by myself. Driving aggression and elevator door closing buttons are just two of my tells that warn me I might need some spiritual renewal, what are yours? Do you have tells?

Into our ever-accelerating, fast and fluid world, Jesus says, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while" (Mark 6:31). According to our Gospel Lesson for this morning, the first followers of Jesus are an awful lot like ourselves - coming and going, with no chance even to sit back and grab a bite! The disciples had just returned from their very first mission trip. Jesus had sent them out in pairs to the towns and villages in Galilee and when they returned, they all told stories of healing the sick, casting out demons, and spreading the Good News of God’s Love. Even as they came together for rest, their fame grew and the crowds were relentless. They pressed the disciples and Jesus from all sides. So, they escape by boat to yet another deserted place. Only problem was, Jesus couldn’t find any place to hold up. He didn’t have his own mancave, complete with Lazy-Boy recliner and big 4K flat screen TV. Every place they went, the crowd formed and demanded Jesus’ attention. His reaction was to feed them, all 5000, to teach them, and to heal them. He had, what our translation calls compassion on them. He pitied them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

In the verses that were left out of today’s Gospel text, verses 35-52, Jesus modeled the behavior for all His followers. He taught the crowd. He fed the crowd. Then he healed the crowd. After the work was done he sent the disciples ahead to the next stop on their mission tour while he went up on a mountain to pray. Finally, Jesus found his mancave. He found the sweet spot where he could finally get back in touch with His higher power - God Our Father. Even Jesus knew when he was reaching the point of High Anxiety and if there were elevators, He might have been tempted to punch the door closed button much harder than is needed for it to function… Jesus took the time away from the crowd and even from teaching his own disciples and closest followers, to get away, to fill his spiritual tank, and to commune with His Heavenly Father. Once refueled, Jesus comes down from the mountain so rejuvenated from His spiritual retreat he walks straight across the water to where the disciples are and picks up the mission with even more enthusiasm and success.

That’s how the concept of Sabbath is supposed to work. You take time away to decompose, then to rebuild and to refresh your spirit. Is that how your time away usually goes? I wish my vacations were so relaxing. I usually need to get back to work to get a rest from all the sightseeing and vacationing. We travel to far away places, cram a month’s worth of activity into four or five days and then travel all those miles back and go back to work the next day. If that sounds like your vacations, then I’ll let you in on a little secret, you are not getting the rest and relaxation you need to refill your spiritual well. In fact, for the Sabbath rest I’m talking about, you don’t even need to leave your house, let alone the state… All you need is 15 minutes or more to be alone and talk to your God. Silence is good, but if you’re not comfortable with silence a little soft music can be very soothing.

Cultivating a lifestyle where you take the time to Sabbath isn’t just a good idea, your body and soul are made for this cycle of work followed by rest and recuperation. I used to be a runner back in the day. I was up to 8 – 10 miles every day. What I discovered was if I didn’t take a day off from running at least once per week my legs and knees would start nagging me. My body was telling me it needed a Sabbath day to rest and recuperate. Your spirit or soul, whatever you prefer to call your inner self, is made the same way. You can only give and give and give of yourself so much, until you have no more to give. A very wise seminary professor once told our class you can only practice self-giving love so long as you have a self to give. If you use it all up, then you have nothing left to give.

The good news is God already knows you need your rest and built you to respond to the commandment to keep the Sabbath Holy. From the beginning God, our Heavenly Father, modeled the behavior he expects us to follow. He created for 6 days and on the 7th day even God himself took a break. God refreshed God’s own spirit by looking over the work and admiring creation, calling everything He had done “Good.” Even Jesus retreats to the mountain top to be with God. In the Bible, mountaintops, seashores, and the Temple are three places where God is known to be present. So, when Jesus retreats to the mountain top, he isn’t just getting back to nature, this action is the storytellers way of letting the readers know Jesus went to commune with His Father in the heavenly places. That’s the essence of Sabbath.

So, if you’re taking trips to exotic places, running about making sure your children and or grandchildren are having every experience possible (especially all those things you missed out on as a child) and you’re telling yourself you’re taking these times as your Sabbath, I have some bad news. You’re most likely just adding more giving and not refilling your empty spiritual well. If you’re lucky enough to have “leisure” time and you’re spending it on the golf course or baseball diamond or even on a sunny beach in a tropical climate, but are not seeking your Heavenly Father in those places where you know He is present, you’re not really refilling your spiritual well and it’s no surprise you feel tired, unfulfilled and irritated.

Seeking the counsel of a good spiritual director, seeking God in prayer and in Worship, and partaking in God’s Word and the Sacraments, these are the proven ways we know our spiritual wells get refilled. These are the ways God has provided for us to get our selves back in proper alignment. These are the ways we decompose so God can recompose us into His people. These are the things followers of Jesus Christ do, not to gain the approval of God, but to return to Jesus, our Lord and our God so we can be filled with His spirit and sent back out into the world where the demands of living always take and take, and take some more from our spiritual wells. Didn’t Jesus say if you drink from the water He provides you will never thirst again? My friends, when you drink of Jesus, the living water and feel your spiritual well-being filled to overflowing, you will be refreshed and rejuvenated for your journey of faith.

May you find the time to take a true Sabbath and find your mountaintop or deserted place where you can be reborn again and again by God’s love and Grace. Once filled, may you rejoin the workforce of God’s people as we are still making our mission tour and encountering people in need of the very source of power we ourselves connect to. Thanks be to Jesus Christ, our strength and the source of our renewal, amen.