

OPENING:

When I was in grad school in Boston, there was a *street person* who spent every day on Commonwealth Avenue, holding a variety of large signs that read “Repent, and be saved!” or a similar Bible verse relating to sin and damnation. Greeting everyone with that sort of message, this man—probably homeless, probably mentally ill—was a well-known fixture of the community. He was tolerated, but also looked down upon, with a mixture of novelty and annoyance. He worked hard at his job though and was always there, outside the subway stops, the campus’ own “John the Baptist.”

During this time, I had friends who one year took the mandatory Spring Break trip to Florida, to Daytona Beach or Panama City or somewhere. While they were there, on some random beach enjoying the sand and the sun, they were surprised to see, sitting by himself and minding his own business, this street person from up North. Astonished by the coincidence, my friends went up to him, introduced themselves and exclaimed how amazing it was that they had all ended up in the same beach together.

Our sign-holder replied to them, calmly but forcefully: “Well I need a vacation too, it’s nice to see you, but please respect my privacy, I will see you back in Boston.”

REST & MOTION:

Our Gospel story starts off being a story about *rest*,
and ends up being a story about *work*.

It starts off being a story about what the disciples and Jesus *wanted*,
and ends up being a story about what the people *needed*.

The saying goes: “life is what happens when we have made other plans.” Well “if life is what happens we have made other plans, then Jesus certainly experienced a lot of life.”¹

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is typically in perpetual motion, and thus it should not surprise that here, even as he tries to seek out some solace and solitude with the disciples, that the crush of humanity is already there, waiting for him. The sick and hungry have already showed up at the Air BnB that the disciples have rented.

¹ Beverly Zink-Sawyer. “Between Text and Sermon- Mark 6.30-34” *Interpretation*. 289.

Imagine if that stack of files from your office, those ominous unchecked emails that you put off for your return, the pile of ungraded papers, maybe even the sniveling child of your next-door neighbors, were all the sudden at the place that you anticipated having your vacation?

Or indeed, what if the homeless and the needy and the mentally ill were there and required our attention?

PIVOT:

SO, on the one hand, this is a passage about *rest*. It helpfully appears midsummer, when we need it the most, when we need to stop, to resist our culture's focus on work, when we need to slow down and retreat and "to come away to a deserted place.

The Gospels are clear enough, if we look at the pattern of Jesus' behavior that time away for rest and recharge was essential to who he was and who *we* are called to be.

ON THE OTHER HAND, this is *also* a passage about *foregoing* rest. It's equally clear that Jesus, when he saw the teeming crowds at his vacation spot, understood their state and "had compassion for them" and went right back to work....

Luckily, he is Jesus and we are not, SO I prefer to speak on the part about REST.

HANGRY

One of my favorite new expressions is "HANGRY"—One is "hangry" when you get so "hungry" that you get "angry" → "HANGRY!"

The disciples in our passage, Jesus even, were "hangry" so much so that they need to press pause in the frantic pace of their ministry.

They were probably so busy that they had forgotten which happened first: did their hunger cause their anger and frustration and tiredness? Or did their lack of rest and focus on the mission cause their hunger?

I know that when I am HANGRY, I lose the ability to tell the difference.

SANDWICH:

At the risk of mixing metaphors, our passage today features one of the Gospel of Mark's famous Markan "sandwiches." This is a common literary tactic of the author where, in order to frame one story, he would place it within two brackets, to bring out the larger meaning.

You will notice that the lectionary divides the 6th chapter with a chunk missing in the middle. So today we get the before and the after, what might be called the two slices of bread, with the meat missing in the middle.

You might call it a pie crust with no filling, two pieces of bread without the good stuff in between.

What is missing? What is missing in between?

I will tell you, and it's delicious—in between there is the Feeding of the 5000, the greatest miracle in all of Jesus' ministry.

With the Feeding of the 5000, we are dealing with a "HANGRY" situation that went beyond just a minor inconvenience, beyond the discomfort of most of us who need a vacation to prevent us from more work. Here are people desperate for food and healing, a population that, of course, we know still exists in our own midst.

Much is made over the fact that with the hungry crowd, that Jesus first "taught the crowd many things", prior to the miraculous feast. That order, that prioritization, sometimes is lifted up as a model for how churches, non-profit organizations, governmental agencies and even individuals should handle those who need rest and nourishment. We can bend over backwards thinking about when one should supply spiritual aid, and when to provide physical sustenance, and in what order.

It is the falsest of distinctions. Clearly, when one is "hangry", you are inextricably both hungry and angry. To separate the two seems besides the point. I think we are beginning to know enough about the root causes of hunger, of poverty, of homelessness, and of addiction, that the soul and the body are fused so tightly that we need not separate the two. When one offers a hungry person a meal you are soothing another's soul, when you sooth another's soul, you are offering them a meal.

I have the privilege of living next door to the church where I witness the constant comings and goings of Good Shepherd's FACETS teams from preparing hot meals for those need in our community. I marvel at their dedication and effort, and that of the other feeding ministries at Good Shepherd, and thank God for it. My guess is that the recipients of those meals are nourished in both body and soul.

CONCLUSION:

It's a curiosity that, in the English language, that the words "Vocation" and "Vacation" have only a single vowel separating the two.

It's more curious still that in the Ten Commandments the commandment that reads "Honor the Sabbath" is only one commandment away from "Thou Shalt not murder." Perhaps that is an indication of the seriousness with which God takes this subject of rest.

We need to hear that in a culture where "Busy-ness" is a badge of self-worth/ importance.

We need to listen to Jesus and his attitude towards work: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest... For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."²

That invitation towards rest and Sabbath, of course, is also a weekly invitation to weekly worship right here.

We are called to Sunday worship because we have been called by Jesus to come be with him in this quiet place. And having experienced that, and renewed in Word and Sacrament, we are ready to be sent out... "to do all such good works that (God) has prepared for us to walk in."³

Such attitude towards rest helps nurture a rhythm of faith, the cycle of discipleship where we don't truly go to be alone, or away from the needs of the world, but to be with God.

AMEN

² Matthew 11:28,30 (KJV)

³ *Book of Common Prayer*, pg. 339.