

It Was No Vacation  
Mark 6:30-34, 53-56  
September 6, 2020

Do you sometimes find yourself thinking about how nice it would be to have a day with no interruptions, no phone calls, no appointments, no errands to run, no work to do –just a day of well-deserved rest and freedom? Do you ever find yourself frustrated with all the things that seem to end up on your “to do” list? What if you actually had the time to accomplish your priorities? Do you ever dream of a vacation where no one can reach you and there are no demands on your time, when the smart thing to do might be to turn *off* your Smartphone, and not even check Facebook 20 times a day? Well it ain’t gonna’ happen, at least not on this side of heaven!

With the official end of summer, it may go down as the year without vacations for many, at least scaled back from what it would usually have been due to covid-19. I know a few of you have enjoyed some camping, or renting a cabin for a couple nights. We had a couple day trips to hike in the redwoods, but mainly stayed around and worked on fixing up our new house. It was a staycation, like many of you had.

We all need a break – a chance to get away, to kick back and do whatever you do that helps you feel renewed. Jesus and the disciples needed a break in today’s gospel lesson – but it didn’t happen. Their plans were abruptly changed. It was no vacation. We know that Jesus valued time alone, to pray, meditate, and discern God’s plan for his life. We know how he spent time alone in the garden to pray, and how he spent forty days in the wilderness before he even began his ministry.

In today’s gospel, the plan was to have another such opportunity. The disciples were worn out and exhausted. Following Jesus demanded more than they bargained for. So Jesus said to them,

6:31 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.

6:54 When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him,

6:55 and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. (Mark 6:31-34, 53-55)

The Son of God was interrupted . . . many times. His plans and ministry had to be put aside in order to respond to the unexpected, urgent needs of people every day. Today’s incident is just one of many similar incidents in the life and ministry of Jesus. Let’s take a look.

Jesus responded to the crowds with compassion and not impatience. He responded with sympathy, and did not send them away. There is an important lesson to be learned here: God turns interruptions into opportunities for blessings and grace. We might be frustrated, impatient and short with people in a similar situation. But Jesus responded with mercy, compassion and patience, and in today's world, his example might just be the most important lesson we can learn.

Jesus is stressing to his disciples the importance of rest and taking care of themselves . . . the importance of spending time alone, away from daily demands . . . the need to have a little Sabbath time. After all, it was God who created the Sabbath. But then the unexpected happens: Jesus and the disciples are discovered by the crowd at their lake-side retreat center. Instead of a well-deserved break, Jesus and the disciples are facing a new crisis.

The word was out about Jesus, and people walked ten miles around the northern end of the lake to reach the spot where Jesus and the disciples would land. Ten miles. They were waiting for him. They were hungry, hurting and desperate. Many of them would have been in the crowd when Jesus feed the multitudes, so they knew what he could do. The plans Jesus had for a retreat, a time of rest and prayer would have to wait. Their plans were abruptly changed. When our plans are interrupted, we can take the opportunity to draw closer to God, and make sure we take the time to be renewed and centered.

Have your vacation plans ever been interrupted? What did you do? Almost every family has a story about a vacation gone awry, or plans that are scrapped. My wife tells a story about one of their family vacations when four kids and a baby were traveling from southern California to Spokane, WA in the family station wagon. You'll have to ask her to tell you more about it. There was nearly no vacation. On the way there they had two flat tires! There was a defect on the brand new tires -- and they had an overheated engine, and a trip to the emergency room due to a bee sting!

Four or five years ago, when we were living in New Jersey, our youngest son Joshua flew to California to visit family. Things had gone well, but on the way back, there was a glitch in the computer system of United Airlines, and Josh spent nearly ten hours at Orange Ct airport before even taking off! It was not the end to his vacation he was expecting.

Just this past spring, folks from my wife's church were scheduled to take vacation time and go to Louisiana to help clean up after a flood, but things were cancelled due to covid. You probably could add your own unforgettable vacation stories. But nothing could top what Jesus and the disciples faced in today's gospel lesson.

Jesus is just getting back together with the disciples who have been out ministering in his name. Just prior to today's reading in the gospel, the disciples learn that John the Baptist had been beheaded by Herod. They had just buried his body and reported back to Jesus. Jesus wanted them to take a break and get some rest. The disciples needed time alone to deal with their grief . . . but it was not to be.

He wanted them to be refreshed and renewed in their own faith and ministry. But the multitudes had other ideas. Someone knew where to find Jesus. The word was out. They pressed in around him and they were getting desperate. They were in need of what only Jesus could give . . . . . a word of grace . . . a word of healing and hope . . . forgiveness or encouragement . . . a meal . . . a miracle, and Jesus responded.

He didn't let them down. While some might have responded to these pressing needs with frustration or anger, Jesus responded with compassion and empathy. His response was to minister, to heal and to teach. He put the needs of others ahead of his own. He met their needs with compassion and mercy.

What are we to make out of all of this? God is never too busy for you. God never tells you to come back later. Your friends might be busy. Your family might have other plans, but God is never too busy for you. The plans of Jesus were interrupted when the multitudes crowded around him and clamored for his attention. But rather than complain or ignore them, Jesus responded with compassion and care. God cares when *our* lives make a detour or take a wrong turn. God has compassion for us and reaches out to help, just like Jesus did for the multitudes.

Sometimes it is in the detours and interruptions where Christ is the most present -- with the lost job . . . the missed opportunity . . . an untimely death of a loved one . . . a difficult diagnosis . . . a devastating divorce, emotional turmoil, even a virus that won't go away.

Many families planning a vacation in August this year instead had to flee for their lives as wildfires encroached their homes. Throughout the unexpected events of a lifetime, the disappointments and heartaches mount up. But in spite of these things, if we take time to seek God with all of our heart and mind, we discover that, far from being absent, God is right in the midst of the storms we encounter, and has been right there with us all along --especially in the details and detours of everyday life.

Thank goodness God is never too busy to notice, and doesn't mind if we interrupt.

Even Jesus had other plans, as you saw in the story this morning. Once in a while we catch a glimpse of God's plan when our lives are disrupted or take a detour – especially when the unexpected happens – that's when God seems to be the most present – like on a stormy sea or in a tumultuous crowd.

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Your time is not God's time. There will be interruptions and disappointments. Maybe that is the perfect time to make time for God. Sometimes it is not a vacation, but it's just what you need. When our plans are interrupted, it's no interruption for God, who comes to us as a divine spirit that dwells within. You will never find a "Do Not Disturb" or "No vacancy" sign on God's door.

The word "crisis" in the Greek New Testament means, "opportunity." Whenever there was a crisis, Jesus saw an opportunity – an opportunity to draw closer to God . . . an opportunity to embrace what really matters in our lives, an opportunity to give people maybe not what they want, but exactly what they need by being present.

This was a summer unlike any other, and without a vacation for many. This is a year when it might seem like many lives were put on hold, and plans were interrupted . . . where work, school, and life as we know it have been radically changed. It was and is a summer when instead of going for a vacation in August, people across the state had to evacuate as wildfires encroached on their homes.

God will be there. The spirit of Christ will be there. Wherever you are, God will be there. God is as close as your next breath and your next prayer. Let's take it from Jesus when he encountered a desperate, suffering multitude. It was no vacation, but it was an opportunity for people to have their needs met and draw closer to God. May we recognize such a moment, and embrace them when they come. Amen.

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

6:30 The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught.

6:31 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.

6:32 And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.

6:33 Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them.

6:34 As he 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.

6:53 When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat.

6:54 When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him,

6:55 and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was.

6:56 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.