

## **Psalm 23 (KJV)**

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.<sup>2</sup> He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.<sup>3</sup> He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup>Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.<sup>5</sup> Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

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

The apostles gathered 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 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.

<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.

## **A Quiet Place**

**August 19, 2018**

A woman opened her refrigerator and saw a rabbit sitting on one of the shelves.

"What are you doing in there?" she asked.

The rabbit replied: "This refrigerator is a Westinghouse, isn't it?"

To which the lady replied "Yes."

"Well," the rabbit said, "I'm westing." (take a moment...)

There are many angles on which to focus in this morning's reading from the Gospel of Mark. But I am going to focus on the first two verses of this story, especially the words Jesus spoke to his excited and weary disciples, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest for a while." If you recall, the disciples had just returned from their first mission trip. Jesus had given them his authority to release people from the demons that held them captive and to touch people's lives with his healing love.

They were probably exhausted but also excited to tell Jesus everything about their successes, their failures, their joys, and their frustrations. I'll bet they were just about to burst with all the stories they had to share. But Jesus knew from experience that they might also be exhausted not only physically, but mentally and spiritually. He understood that personally, and he knew that what they really needed was to get away from the crowds and the needs of the world and rest for a minute.

The disciples had been so pre-occupied with caring for others that they didn't ever take time to stop and eat. Does that sound like anybody here today? I confess I am never to busy to eat, as you can see, but I do know what it is like to be busy and be so distracted that I can't focus anymore. There are a lot of needs in the world and as you can read even in this story, Jesus and the disciples are not able to get away from the people who are following them in need of food and healing. And many of us find ourselves in the same boat.

There are things to do and places to go and people to meet. We have families to care for, jobs to get to, laundry to take care of, meals to plan, rehearsals to get to, books to read, vacuuming to do, dogs to walk, litter boxes to clean! We are a busy people, and for many, the thought of being still or sitting quietly does not come naturally to us. If we aren't buried in our phones or computers or the television, we are moving around like the energizer bunny banging our symbols and spinning in circles.

There was a study out of UCLA reported in the Boston Globe, that was based on observing the typical week of thirty-two middle class families in the Los Angeles area. The idea was to take a detailed snapshot of American family life early in the 21st century. The results, according to one researcher, were "disheartening." So consumed with working, collecting, amassing, and generally "getting ahead," they actually spent very little time together enjoying what they were working for. Jeanne Arnold, lead author and a professor of anthropology at UCLA, shared her particular dismay at how little time family members spent outside: "Something like 50 of the 64 parents in our study never stepped outside in the course of about a week," she said. "When they gave us tours of their house they'd say, 'Here's the backyard, I don't have time to go out there.' They were working a lot at home. Leisure time was spent in front of the TV or at the computer." They have not time, in other words, to rest." (2012 Boston Globe article titled, Boxed in, Wanting Out.) [Boston Globe](#)

A story is told about some African workers who were hired to carry heavy equipment on their backs to a remote outpost. It was a place that couldn't be reached any other way but on foot. After several days of difficult travel, the workers refused to pick up their packs and go any further. They sat by the side of the trail ignoring the shouts of the leader of the expedition. Finally, the leader asked why they wouldn't go on. One of the workers replied, "Sir, we are waiting for our souls to catch up with our bodies." And how often have you felt like that? I'm having something of that same experience right now being in this production of Godspell. It has been several years since I've been involved with a production and it has been a bit of an adjustment and even a bit of a shock to be in rehearsal every evening for 2-3 hours. I'm not complaining, but I keep meeting myself coming and going, and the only thing that is really holding it all together is that I have time each day to sit and pray. To be still and listen to God and be thankful for my life.

And Sabbath rest is so important not only for our physical bodies but for our souls, and that is why Jesus is calling us to follow him somewhere quiet and deserted that we might hear his voice and be in his Father's presence. To pray and listen and let our souls catch up with the demands of the day. It's about balance in our lives and that is often a hard thing for us. And Jesus gets that. He had to balance these things too. Even he got tired and overwhelmed and when he did, he took a break. He knew that God was able to take care of the things that overwhelmed him, and he went to a mountain top or a quiet place along the river or the sea, and he talked to God. I don't know if you were listening to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm this morning, but the Psalmist clearly says that "He *makes* me lie down in green pastures; he *leads* me beside still waters; he restores my soul." It is God's desire that you find a place to be restored and it has me wondering if you are taking time for this?

I read this short story about Philip Melancthon, who was a Reformation theologian, who once said to his friend Martin Luther, "This day you and I will discuss the governance of the universe." What Luther said in response was unexpected: he said, "This day you and I will go fishing and leave the governance of the universe to God." And that is really a crucial aspect of all this, isn't it? There will always be greater concerns and needs that we just can't handle and sometimes we just have to leave those in God's care, don't we?

My good friend Kathy Campbell asked these questions in her sermon, she asked, "When have you sat outside and just listened to the birds sing and the leaves rustle and the water flowing and felt so completely connected to God's creation? When have you stopped in the middle of the day to thank God for all the blessings you have already received and pray for the awareness to see and feel God's presence the rest of the day? When have you gone to a quiet place all by yourself to be silent and listen for the still small voice of God? When have you laid

on your back and looked up at the clouds by day or the stars by night and stared in wonder feeling like a little child once more?" This is Sabbath rest, too.

I'm going to close today with a devotion that I wrote about a month ago and one that speaks to the kind of rest I think Jesus is calling us to. It was a devotion shared with other tired pastors and elders who carry a lot of burdens in their ministries. I hope it speaks to you. It went like this:

"A couple years ago I bought a new weed eater. I'd been through several gas-powered ones, which never seem to last more than a season, so this time I bought a battery powered one. It's a little different. The balance isn't the same and it took a little getting used to but all in all it works pretty well. It is certainly quieter.

The battery will last for about 35-40 minutes before it runs out which *almost* gets the work done. Usually I am about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way finished when it runs out. I then take it in and put it on the charger and because I'm mostly interested in not working in the yard, I sit down and read or pray or think about things. I keep thinking to myself I should get a back-up battery, so I can just keep working. But then it occurred to me that that is precisely why I won't get one.

Because it seems that too often when we get to the end of our energy we choose to grab a red bull or a Mountain Dew or another cup of coffee or a very large cookie, and just keep working, often way beyond our ability to be effective. We would much rather keep going than stop and rest. Recharging our batteries or sitting or praying or doing something entirely unproductive seems foreign to us. (And while I write this, the battery charger on my weed eater continues to blink it's green eye at me.)

I listened to an interview on NPR last week where parents were calling in to give advice on how to deal with their kids using technology at home. One parent shared that they charge their kid's iPad on Sunday night and that has to last the whole week. How you use the thing will determine how long your charge will last. I can just imagine the whining in that household. But I'm pretty sure we would act the same. How we use the charge we have will determine how long it will last! (there's a sermon in there somewhere!)

And it has me wondering about letting the batteries in my phone and Kindle run out more often as well. We are so certain that we must be reached and be available we don't even let our phones drop below 50% before we are plugging them in again. And Oh, the cursing when you pick up your kindle or iPad and the battery is nearly dead. Now what?

I am sure I read somewhere that it is actually good for your battery to run down at least once a month. to fully discharge it, is the way they put it. (and there is another sermon in that one too.)

A couple times in the gospels Jesus sent the disciples out to heal and spread the good news and when they returned he encouraged them to come away to a quiet place, a deserted place, and rest. The world doesn't particularly want us to do that, but I think God does. It isn't the most productive or efficient but maybe it's the most divine way of doing things. I don't know.

I do know that right now I'm not getting as much yard work accomplished as I thought but I certainly am resting more in between, while I keep one eye on that green light on the charger to stop blinking, and the other on the Holy, reminding me that, *There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God, a place where sin cannot molest, near to the heart of God. O Jesus, blest redeemer, sent from the heart of God, hold us, who wait before thee, near to the heart of God.*

*Let us pray.*

*Loving God help us to use the energy and talents we have wisely. and give us courage to rest when we need too, trusting that you will fill us with the strength we need for the challenges ahead. We thank you for this time to gather and share our gifts and energies with one another. Bless and guide us we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen.*