

FINDING OUR RHYTHM:
LINING UP WITH THE HEARTBEAT OF GOD

Rest

Mark 6:30-34

Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

March 15, 2015

Audio: www.fbcjc.org/sermon/finding-our-rhythm-rest/

It was the heart of winter. I had been dealing with the ravages of death and disease upon our congregation, the cruelty of poverty in our community, the grinding power of deadlines. I didn't realize it, but I was feeling the tension. It was about 3:00pm. Rod came to my office door, "Come with me!" We walked into the sanctuary and this beautiful piano music was flooding the place. His piano teacher from childhood was passing through. We sat and listened and I felt the tension drain away. I had two thoughts. First, "Now, if someone would just give me a back rub!" The other, "What if we took a break like this every day?"

We are tired people! Our lives have lots of ragged edges. You know who our national hero is? The person who works at Starbucks (or Dunn Bros, etc.). The girl with the headset makes your Caramel Machiotta with skim milk, extra hot while takes the order for the car behind you and rings up the bill of the car in front of you. Multi-tasking, that's the new normal! Let's face it, folks. We may fail at lots of things, but we're great at being busy! We need to remember what Meister Eckhart said: "God is not found in the soul by adding anything but by subtracting." In our text, the phrase, "desert place apart" or "wilderness place apart" is used twice for emphasis (vv. 31-32). Vance Havner once said, "If we don't come apart and rest, we'll just come apart."

Because of Christ's work for us, we may rest in his love, in his forgiveness, in his new beginning and in his eternal hope. Why do we have so much trouble entering into that rest, claiming that rest in our daily experience?

Why do we need to rest? What kinds of things exhaust us? (I am thinking here about more than just the biological need to sleep). Consider the surrounding verses (the context). Jesus had just learned that John the Baptist had been killed. Jesus' cousin. Grief can exhaust us. What loss are you grieving? It's tiring, isn't it? But more than that, John's death no doubt was sobering to Jesus. This is what is waiting for you, too, Jesus! Reconsidering your life's mission. Counting the cost. Dealing with competing values and opinions. These things can just wear us out. And then don't forget all the demands on Jesus for healing and help. We all enjoy people needing us. But sometimes, we just feel pulled in so many directions! Worn out.

In the midst of this, Jesus knew enough to get away and rest and to invite the disciples to do the same. So solitude is good, even if you are an extrovert...maybe especially if you are one! Listen to Richard Foster's words about solitude. "Loneliness brings inner emptiness; solitude brings inner fulfillment" [*Celebration of Discipline*, p. 96].

We often mention why Jesus removed himself to rest, but we rarely talk about how that rest energized him. Granted, his attempt to rest and retreat didn't work this time, but other gospel stories tell us enough to let us know Jesus made time to refuel. Notice that because Jesus kept his tank full, he could serve the suffering. Note the verbs in v. 34: He went ashore (incarnational ministry, plunging into the lives of people...he saw the great crowd...he had compassion...). Without rest, we can't go ashore, see the needs or have compassion. Instead, we are irritable, unkind or unfeeling. They were like sheep without a shepherd. That's our culture today. That's the pain in our community. People in need, aimless, lacking purpose.

By the way, mark this down, as FBC JC begins to work on strategic direction. Churches tend to look inward for their priorities and strategic plan--inward to their history, faith tradition, scripture, etc. All well and good. But we also discover our mission by listening to people outside the church, the people at the margins, at risk. The vulnerable. The hungry, the poor the nobodies (according to culture). The "sheep without a shepherd" at the periphery [I am indebted to Pope Francis for this idea, as cited by Austen Ivereigh throughout his biography of the pope in *The Great Reformer*].

I told you earlier this winter about the book entitled *Slow Church* (by C. Christopher Smith and John Pattison). Their image is that churches should be more like sit-down restaurants that grow their own vegetables than drive-through fast-food joints that crank out meals meant for constant motion but quickly forgotten. If the church is the body of Jesus on earth, the presence of Christ, then we need to reflect Jesus' rhythm. His heartbeat. And speaking of Jesus' rhythm, listen to this. "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me--watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace" (Matthew 11:28-29).

I once heard the actress Brooke Shields interviewed. She was asked what her favorite sound was. She smiled and replied, "The sound of my baby snoring." What if God's favorite sound is not our programs, our songs, sermons or prayers, but our snoring? His people resting in His grace.