

Mount Olive Lutheran Church
Sermon for Sunday, July 19, 2009
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Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I'm sure we would all probably answer the question, "Yes," if someone asked us if we needed time away to go and rest, to be by ourselves. Busy-ness is something that plagues every one of us, and I think that we just always are busy, it's just something that's in our nature. We always have things to do and we don't take the time to rest that we have. And so, as we're busy and as we don't take that time to rest (because there's so much to do) we just get more and more run down. More and more drained of our energy. And then all of the things that we have to do become even more burdensome. Sometimes we just need time away.

There's a reason God gives us the Sabbath day: to rest. To realize all the wonders that He's given to us. But we hardly ever actually take that. We just don't have the time to. We don't rest. We don't get away. We don't get away and just listen to God's Word. We don't do all of these things - which hurts us, because we need time to process different things. Different things happen in our lives and sometimes you just need to get away and rest and process and think about things. But there's always something to do, and so we never actually get that time away. It's human nature. It's what we have to deal with.

Jesus and His disciples dealt with the same thing. Jesus was truly Man. Sometimes we forget that. He needed time away to rest, to pray, and to process things. And He knew that. And so His disciples, and throughout the whole first part of Mark we've just seen these things happen immediately, one after another. All these things that Jesus and His disciples are doing. And finally He says to them, we need to get away and rest. So he says, "Come away, by yourselves, to a desolate place and rest for a while."

You see, so many people were coming to them and going to them that Mark even tells us they had no leisure time - even to *eat*. Even to take that time of the day to sit down and relax even for a few minutes and eat something to sustain them. They don't even have *that* time. So they go away. And they go away to rest, to think about things. To reflect on the apostles having been sent out and doing all these wonderful things and coming back to Jesus and telling them all those things.

And while Mark doesn't record it, the other gospels do, this time of rest happens right after Jesus hears that John the Baptist has been murdered. And so He goes away because He wants time to rest, and to think about these things. He needed it. But everybody else wanted to be there with Him.

They saw them going over, across in the boat, and what do they do? Do they give them time to rest? No, they *ran* over there to see where He was, because they knew they needed to be there with Him. To hear Him. To receive His gifts.

So Jesus and the disciples come to the other side of the lake. They arrive and Jesus sees all of these people around Him. Even though He knew they needed time to rest, He has compassion on them. And compassion is not even a strong enough word. Literally, He was sick in His guts about seeing these people without a shepherd. Without anyone to lead them, without anyone to guide them, to teach them, to be with them, and to be their shepherd. And so even though He had every right to turn them away and to say that He needed time to be alone, He doesn't. He teaches them.

He sits down, because they're sheep without a shepherd and they need to be taught. They need to know who He is and receive His gifts. So even though He needs time away, in compassion He gives Himself even more to them. Because that's what Jesus does.

He has compassion and He gives beyond all needs. He gives to us all these wonderful things, and that's what He does for these people. And He teaches them all day, and then it gets to be late in the evening. You can imagine how grumpy the disciples probably were, after not eating and not having time to eat. We know how that all is with us.

They come to Jesus and they say, "Alright, it's evening. You've taught them all day. We've done our duty. Send them away, send them off to the villages to go get something to eat." And maybe then they can have that time of rest. But Jesus doesn't.

He says, "No, you give them something to eat." And they ask, "What, do you want us to go out and buy bread and bring it back and feed them?" He says, "No, bring what you have." And they bring him 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. And with that, He feeds an innumerable amount of people. "5,000 men," Mark records, "not recording all the women and children and others that were there with them."

But that's what Jesus does. That's who God is. He gives of Himself and He has compassion on us because He knows that we need Him. Because alone we are like sheep without a shepherd, going wherever we please, doing whatever we want - which only ruins us and makes us worse.

This is Psalm 23, fulfilled. Jesus, the Shepherd, leading His flock into the pasture, into the green grass and setting them down to feed them. He feeds them with His Word and then He feeds them with that daily bread that they all need. And this text is just beautiful. Mark sometimes, (everyone thinks he's very plain and translators think he's plain and dull, so they kind of dumb-down his words) ...but the way he puts a lot of this, just makes the picture even more brilliant than it is. Jesus sets them down in *garden plots*, is what the Greek word is. Not in groups, but sets them down as you would in garden plots, in groups of 50 and 100. Tiny groups of a garden that will hear that Word and be fed, and be strengthened, and grow.

Another word that Mark uses is *symposium*. He sits them down, *symposia* by *symposia*, which, to the Greek culture that's reading Mark and that he's writing to, brings so much more energy and life to this story. A symposia - now we think of it as going to the seminary

for their *symposias* - but what a symposia is at its root is that it's a drinking, banqueting party, where you would sit and learn from a teacher. It's what Plato and Aristotle and all those Greek philosophers would talk about, if you read through there. There's the *symposias*, they sit down and they teach, and they use different lessons

That's what Jesus is doing here. He sits down these 5,000 men and countless others, in groups of 50 and 100; little, tiny banqueting parties. And He feeds them. He feeds them with His Word, He feeds them with bread and with fish and He strengthens them and He nourishes them. Because He is their true Shepherd. Because they are like sheep without a shepherd, and they need Him.

And He does the same thing with us today. He sets us down in groups of 50 and 100 and groups in churches all over the world, all part of one congregation, teaching and feeding us. Teaching us with His Word, as it's read and as it's preached. Feeding us with His Word as we are absolved and told that we are forgiven even though we are poor, miserable sinners. Feeding on His Body and His Blood in the Lord's Supper and being strengthened in our faith. Because nothing separates us from Christ. That's really what this text is about, moreso than having a miracle and feeding a little bit of bread and a little bit of fish to all these people.

But it shows the lengths to which Jesus goes. Nothing separates Him. Nothing separates Him from the work that needs to be done. Nothing separates Him from His sheep at all. Neither death, nor life, nor...*anything* keeps us away from Christ.

The death of John the Baptist doesn't keep Him away. Even His own death doesn't keep Him away from us. His compassion is so great that He goes to the Cross for us, and dies for us. But even that death, dying our death as a Shepherd giving His life for the sheep, He comes back. And He's resurrected on the third day and He conquers death, and Satan and the power of hell. He conquers our sin.

And now, even though He died and He is risen again, He's not separated from us. He comes to us, physically. He is here with us. Where two or three are gathered in His name, He comes through His Word, through His Sacraments, through the waters of Holy Baptism. And He feeds us, His sheep, who are in need of a Shepherd. And He gives to us a foretaste of what heaven is going to be like.

That's what He gave to those people that day, as He fed them and as He taught them. That's what He gives us today as well. He gives us a taste of heaven. Where Jesus is present, there is heaven, and He is present here with us in and with the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper. And we get to commence in that eating. We get to sit, we get to recline, we get to relax and be fed. That's what Sunday morning is about. It's about being a sheep, and sitting there and hearing the Words of the Shepherd, and receiving His gifts.

And now may this peace of God that surpasses all our understanding, may it guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus alone. Amen.