

“Feeding Bodies & Souls”
July 18, 2021; 10:00am Outdoor
Mark 6:30-56
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
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³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

³² So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.³³ But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

³⁵ By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. “This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late.”³⁶ Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”

³⁷ But he answered, “You give them something to eat.”

They said to him, “That would take more than half a year’s wages^[a]! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?”

³⁸ “How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.”

When they found out, they said, “Five—and two fish.”

³⁹ Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. ⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish and

looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² They all ate and were satisfied,⁴³ and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. ⁴⁴ The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

Jesus Walks on the Water

⁴⁵ Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

⁴⁷ Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. ⁴⁸ He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them,⁴⁹ but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, ⁵⁰ because they all saw him and were terrified.

Immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” ⁵¹ Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, ⁵² for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. ⁵⁴ As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. ⁵⁵ They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

CENTERING PRAYER AS WE BEGIN:

Michelle L. Torigian (based on Mark 6)

Divine Creator of the Sabbath,

This is the day of rest and reflection, and yet, our minds race ahead towards the rest of the week or lag behind, holding the worries of yesterday.

And in this space, the Christ is calling for us to “come away...rest for a while.”

So in this space... breathe. Breathe in the God of peace. Breathe out worries. Breathe in the strength of the Holy Spirit. Breathe out insecurities.

Before we step into this new week, may we find the spaces to rest for a while. May we know that stepping away from life’s necessities will clear our minds to start this new week with renewed spirits.

Bless our minds, our hearts, our souls, loving God.

I. WHAT’S THE BUZZ?

They’re back! The disciples—sent out two-by-two a few days—maybe weeks?—ago on a mission from God, have done their deeds and are ready to report in.

We learned about that mission trip a couple weeks back, the instructions and the puzzling instructions from Jesus about what to do if they and their message weren’t graciously welcomed.

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. ⁷ Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them

out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits.

⁸ These were his instructions: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. ⁹ Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. ¹⁰ Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. ¹¹ And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.”

We pondered what we, like the disciples might need to “shake the dust off of”—not so much turn our backs on others or give up on them when they disagreed with them. But, rather, to look deep inside ourselves and see what unhealthy and unhelpful messages or assumptions we might need to revisit in order to keep proclaiming a message of full inclusion and the Jesus Gospel of Love to all creatures great and small.

Today is Episode Two in the “Sending Out Adventures of the Disciples.” And they are excited to share their stories! We *don’t* actually get to hear whether or not they did any “dust-shaking” after all. If they did, the writer of Mark’s Gospel doesn’t deem it headline news.

It’s fun to imagine, though, that they are all coming back, greeting their families and Jesus and full of their experiences. For they had been on life-changing adventures! Doing ministry in Jesus name, and lives were being changed!

¹² They went out and preached that people should repent. ¹³ They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

That sounds like a pretty successful Mission Trip, doncha think?!

II. REST AWHILE

But then, just as they're jazzed about telling their tales, the crowds start forming—again!—and they can't catch a break. A disciple's job is never done, it seems.

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

They were hungry! They'd missed lunch. And possibly breakfast and supper too! They hadn't even had a chance to unpack their bags, clean out the church van, hug their families, when there was a call for more! More healing. More service in the name of the Lord. More meetings. More church and community business and volunteering that really needed doing!

Sigh. Isn't that the way it always is?

Jesus commands them, "Come away and rest awhile. Come with me. Come be with yourselves. Find a quiet place. A quiet space and time. Renew. Refresh. Restore your souls."

How do you DO that? How do *you* experience rest? Carve out that sacred space and place and just say No to the needs of the world for awhile?

III. BUT THEY'RE HUNGRY JESUS!

"But they're hungry Jesus! And so are we! They need us! And Lord, there are so many sick and ostracized and hurting people all around us. What do you mean—take time for your own souls? I wish!"

Isn't it interesting how very short those verses are?

³² So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³ But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.

Yikes. Even Jesus doesn't get a real break. How can that be healthy? How is that sustainable? That 24/7 ministry—responding to people's needs—feeding their hungers—body and soul—nonstop?

IV. ISN'T THAT THE WAY IT ALWAYS IS?

Could Jesus' message to us in this story *really* be—"Well, come away to a quiet place and rest *if you can*—but that Protestant Work Ethic is more important, really. You don't want to be seen as a slacker; not caring for people—not responding to what needs to be done, just because you happen to be tired. We try to take days off around here but it just doesn't happen very often. Oh well."

Jesus and the disciples are experiencing much the same phenomenon in First Century communal life that we experience today.

You know full well that *caring* never stops! When you belong to a community. Whether we're pastors or lay people, on a Care Committee or Casserole Crew; whether we are physically present or remotely and spiritually. You just always keep caring, don't you?

Pastors are encouraged to have someone on "back-up pastoral care" when on vacation or sabbatical, and to try to stay out of touch if possible. But, how do you do that?! If you're shepherding a flock, loving on your people and sincerely care about the whole congregation's well-being—as a good pastor does—you can't just turn off the "Care-O-Meter" when you finally find a chance to get away and rest awhile.

I think it's the same for every one of you in a congregation and community. Just like being a parent, right? You never stop caring, worrying, wondering about your family.

Jesus got this, in spades.

I surmise it's true of a congregation too, in bigger ways. Even when there is some tumult; rocky roads as a church family—with some needs being different from others, and differing ideas of what we should be about —who handled things right and who did it wrong—we.still.care.

We want to work it out. Hear each other's hearts. We try to avoid triangulation and not keep perpetuating rumors, but incorporate "holy curiosity." We wonder together with open, loving hearts and ears, how we might meet the various needs together, and live out our calling as Christ's disciples. We seek to feed bodies and souls both and all—just as those first disciples did.

And this requires that we feel our *own* bodies and souls, all along the way.

V. JESUS PRAYS IT CAN BE DONE!

No, Jesus does not crack the whip and tell them, "Break's over – get back to it!" He *does* tell them—"look around you and within you—what resources *do* you have right here? What can be done about the hunger—spiritual and physical— if we pull together our weary bodies and spirits and look for the abundance right in our midst? Already here."

"Oh! You've got 5 loaves?! Two fish?! Well, that's a good start. I just imagine if we break the bread and share the fish—focus on what we have in abundance and quit worrying about what we lack—what is scarce—that we will have enough. We will *Be Enough*."

I think Jesus would have liked Thich Nhat Hahn. This modern day spiritual sage reminds us profoundly:

"We have a tendency to think in terms of doing and not in terms of being. We think that when we're not

doing anything, we're wasting our time. But that's not true. Our time is first of all for us to Be. To be what? To be alive, to be peaceful, to be joyful, to be loving. And this is what the world needs the most."

What if we focused more on how we are Human Beings, in this time especially, instead of Human Doings? What if we looked around us and realized *what* we already have in our midst in abundance? Abundant resources for feeding bodies and souls. Right here. Right now. Spiritual blessings!

Jesus knows that the need for work, healing and service will always be there. Especially for Christ's Church! Because that is our mission and purpose—to love and serve in Christ's name and spirit. But, Jesus also knows we need to “come away and rest awhile” *in order to* keep on serving and loving and leading the People of God into the everlasting future.

I surmise Jesus would tell us, if we were in the boat with him today, that “We are Enough. Just as we are. We are doing enough. We are being enough.” And that Presence and “being” our true, authentic selves—as humans and as a congregation in community—is far more powerful and inviting than any project or task we might *do*. Extravagant Welcome is a spirit of *being*—not a mission project or a specific task.

VI. CAN YOU IMAGINE IT?

Martha Spong, pastor theologian, reflects on this passage, along with Jesus. When unable to go to their favorite shoreline to rest awhile and renew their spirits, she and her wife decided to “imagine they were there”

and found they *were* in that sacred place and space “in spirit.”

“I appreciate the emotion conveyed in Jesus' words to the disciples, who had just returned from their two-by-two missions to proclaim repentance and offer healing to people who might or might not want to receive them. So relatable. How many of us spend our lives offering something good to others and hearing that they don't want it? The disciples needed a break.

For ourselves, perhaps we can't take that trip to our special place this summer, but we can *remember* what it feels like to step back from our work, to reflect on it, and, where appropriate, to let go of what didn't work. For us this week, that happened sitting outside a local ice cream place, our view an apartment building. As we unpacked the day, we *imagined* the ocean on the other side.

I could almost feel my feet in the sand.

Prayer—Holy One, help us to imagine! To find the place we need to go to rest with you, if not in body, then in mind and spirit. Help us to look around, see and feel the love, support and nourishment in our midst, and to dig in. And enjoy! Revel. Dance in the sand. Lean on the everlasting arms of Jesus and one another. Amen.