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Pentecost 9 – Mark 6:30-44 – Just What They Needed

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You can almost hear the disciples' sighs, can't you? These last days and weeks were hard – maybe harder than they ever expected. Jesus had sent them out two-by-two to preach repentance, drive out demons, and heal the sick. I'm sure it was exhilarating at times, but every bit as exhausting too. See, Jesus also warned them that there would be plenty of places that *wouldn't* welcome them or listen to them, and he was right. And then, as they were out fighting the good fight, like a punch in the gut, word came of another faithful Gospel worker and dear friend of theirs who was put to death for his faith – John the Baptist. You think the thought ever crossed their minds that if the Jews even came after *him*, a famous preacher who was loved by people all over the country, they just might be next?

They came dragging back to Jesus that day and I'm sure they didn't need to say a word. I'm sure he could see it in their eyes, like you can when you know someone is hurting. Maybe they didn't know what to do or say, but Jesus knew just what they needed. *“The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. 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.’”*

The roller coaster that is ministry to sinful people in a sinful world didn't get any easier when the disciples got back. What they really needed was to debrief and recharge with Jesus, but they just couldn't catch a break. Everywhere they went somebody else needed something more. The problems kept piling up and the people kept piling on. The disciples couldn't take much more, and Jesus knew it. So he took them away, off in a boat by themselves, and he gave them just what they needed: rest for their bodies and rest for their souls.

See, Jesus was teaching the disciples an important lesson when he called them away to himself. After such a straining trip, the disciples needed to know that the only right place for them to go for rest and renewal was to him. They needed his support, and he was strong and

caring enough to give it. Jesus called them to report to him everything they had done because he wanted to be able to answer all their questions, calm all their doubts and fears, and rejoice with them in all their joys and victories. Jesus gave them just what they needed, because he showed them how to get rest for their souls *in him* – and truly, there's nothing we need more.

And today, that's what Jesus means to show you, too, because just like it was for the disciples and just like it was for the crowds that chased after them, here's his heart for you: *“They went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 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.”*

See, just like the disciples did, Jesus wants you to see the love of your Savior. Jesus knows the Christian life is hard. There are days when it'll leave you beaten up and worn out, and he sympathizes because he's been there! He knows us – he knows our willing spirits, but he also knows our limitations. Yes, Jesus calls us to work diligently and faithfully in his Kingdom and with all our hearts, but he knows that we need time to rest and recharge. And so he calls us to himself, because he's the only one who can truly do that for us.

Jesus wants to hear about your friend who finally came to church or Bible study. Jesus wants to hear how exhilarating it is when you tell someone about him. Jesus loves to hear about your joys and your spiritual successes! But he also wants to hear about it when you watch that TV show that shakes your faith, or when you read the blogs and social media that spew hate against Christians and what we believe, or when someone takes offense at your Christian faithfulness and love. He wants to hear about it when you have a serious setback at work, or when your home life suddenly blows up, or when you can't sleep at night because of all the things swirling around in your head. In those times, Jesus reaches out and calls to you, too, *“Come with me, and get some rest.”* He wants you to be steeled by fleeing back to him who is our Rock and Fortress, and he wants you to draw strength from your fellow Christians by gathering together here around his Word.

There's no more important lesson to learn from Christ than to be continually connected to Jesus through his Word and Sacraments, because that's where the disciples and those crowds found just what they needed, and that's where you'll find the rest you need, too. So that means, people of God, take your spiritual life seriously every day! Even if it's only for a few minutes each day, just take time to focus on your Savior, what he's done for you, and what he says to you. Set aside time to pray and read the Word. Have family devotions. Come to weekly Bible studies when they're available. Be in church regularly. It can't be overstated that we need periods of quiet rest with Jesus after periods of hard work in his Kingdom. Not only will they strengthen our relationship with Christ, but they'll also bring us closer to our fellow Christians and bolster our willingness to do the work Christ set before us.

And friends, remember who it is who calls us to himself. Our Savior loves us and cares about us more than we will ever know, and his power and patience never run out. At every moment he is ready and willing to give us whatever we need to keep going – he's promised it, and his promises never fail. When it seemed like the disciples couldn't go on and those crowds couldn't go on, he was there. And he's there for you too, friends, when you don't know how you're going to go on. You may not feel like you have the strength to make it, but he does, and he'll carry you. In fact, there is nothing stronger than the love of our Savior for the people he came to save, and he will never let you down. Now his love may seem pretty tough sometimes – but the truth is, our souls are restless until they find their rest in him, and so that means he will never leave you, he will never forsake you, and he promises that he will always bring you through it stronger and better.

See, Jesus, too, had been out doing his own work while the disciples were away, and he was constantly being mobbed by crazed crowds of people just trying to catch a glimpse of him. Jesus needed a vacation as much as anyone, but when the disciples really needed his support, and when the crowds came to him begging to hear him just a little while longer, Jesus was deeply moved with compassion for them, and his heart melted. I mean, he is our Savior, after all. In that moment all those people who were vying for Christ's attention were coming to realize what Jesus was trying to tell them all along: he had something

they were starving for, something their lives would be empty without, something that was just what they needed. From him they had for the very first time come to know grace and forgiveness and salvation and they had an insatiable appetite to consume more and more and more, and Jesus was not about to deny them. That was, after all, the whole reason he came to this earth – in love for his Father and for us, he came to serve and to give all of himself for the sake of others.

As those people gathered around, as the day dragged on and the heat sapped their strength, Jesus ignored the disciples' calls to send the crowds away and instead told them to come near. The Good Shepherd wasn't about to let wandering sheep go without a second thought. So he spoke God's Word to them, he preached the Gospel to them, and he gave them food for their bodies and for their souls. As he turned one boy's lunch of five loaves and two fish into a banquet for 5,000+, he taught them that whether times are good or bad, whether in plenty or in want, our heavenly Father is always there for us to take care of us, and that will never change. To their ears, Jesus' words were the sweetest, most satisfying thing they had ever heard – it was just what they needed! – and it was our Savior's delight to share that message with hungry souls who were starving for it.

Yes, friends, life as a follower of Christ is tough and demanding. And it's hard to think about anything but yourself when you're worn out and exhausted and just want to sit down and not look at anything but the back of your eyelids. But being with Jesus changes all that. Going through this life with all its ups and downs suddenly isn't so imposing with Jesus at our side – because he never asks anything of us that he doesn't give us the strength and help to get through. He is the Good Shepherd of the sheep, the one who gave all those people that day just what they needed, and the one who promises to do the same for us still today until he finally brings us home to himself. So find your peace and your power in Jesus, friends, because through his Word he recharges you to do his work and he promises to lead his people to the eternal rest we all long for. *Jesus* was just what they needed that day, and he's just what we need too, for now and forever. Amen.