

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Matthew 14:13-21

¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

¹⁵ As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." ¹⁶ Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." ¹⁷ "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. ¹⁸ "Bring them here to me," he said. ¹⁹ And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. 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 the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹ The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

A wealthy retiree goes into a chic club with a stunningly beautiful young woman on his arm. The old fellow turns up his pacemaker and they start to dance. The band plays an up-tempo tune. He turns up his pacemaker again and keeps dancing. Then, the band really starts to cook and plays an even faster number. He turns up his pacemaker even faster and continues dancing.

Then suddenly, the old man slumps over and falls on the floor. A waiter comes over and asks the young woman with him, "Do you want me to call the paramedics?" The woman responds, "No, just call the Auto Club. I think we can jump start him."

What a nut! What kind of a crazy person was the man? He obviously had a heart problem or he would not have had a pacemaker. He pushed his body too far. What he should have done was listen to his tired body and taken a break.

But instead, the man kept pushing himself. He was proud to be seen with a beautiful young woman, and he wanted to show that he could keep up with her on the dance floor. Pushing himself too far put his life at risk.

Just as crazy as this was the woman telling the waiter to call the Auto Club to jump start the man, implying that he didn't need a break; he just needed a good push to get him going again.

This may sound like a ridiculous story, but I contend that in theory, it is right on when it comes to the way many people live their lives today. We live in a society that does not put a high value on rest. People live busy and hurried lives.

Hopefully you are one of the lucky ones who has disciplined yourself to live your lives at an even speed, using your time wisely, listening to your mind and body, busy sometimes but making sure to rest when needed. Likely, however, you know a family member, or two, and some friends who do live like resting is a sign of laziness and weakness. We may become second-hand victims to their obsession or habit of continually overextending themselves with a busy lifestyle. You may not see or hear from them very often because they always seem to have something else they MUST do.

It's not always physical activities that keep people preoccupied with self and staying too busy. Television comes to mind. And how about worry, worry that keeps us awake at night, worry that invades our every thought. We might worry about our families, our health, our money, our future. Just like those who physically run around like the energizer bunny, you know,

the one that keeps going and going and going, we can get burned out and stressed if we do not find rest from whatever keeps us too busy to connect with God.

Jesus knew when it was time to step back and get away from it all. He was followed constantly by people who wanted healing, by people who were curious about who he was, by people who were always trying to catch him doing something illegal so they could get rid of him and by people who truly wanted to learn from him. His disciples were always with him. The mission he was put on earth to complete was demanding. Jesus was selfless, always busy giving to and doing for others.

There are Christians today, perhaps you are one of them, who are selfless. You see things that need to be done and people who need help and in response, you give everything you have within you tirelessly to the task or need at hand. That's okay. It's honorable; but like Jesus we need to take the time to rest, refuel and renew our spirits.

Friends of a young mother with three young children were surprised when they received the following thank you note: "Many thanks for the play pen. It is being used every day. From 2 to 3 P.M., I get in it to read, and the children can't get near me."

This mom knew her children were not going to go away, so she needed to rest so that she could be a good mom. Like her, Jesus always knew that when he returned from his time of rest, the needs and the people would still be there. He did not try to escape from the life he was called to live, and neither should we.

Resting in God is not about running and hiding from life. It's all about connecting with God and getting nourished for the journey. It's about getting filled with physical, emotional and spiritual energy, with knowledge and wisdom, to help us face the challenges of life, including those challenges that will not go away.

It may be a health issue you are dealing with daily. You may find it hard to feel positive and hopeful with your life. Resting in God, with openness, will help to change your attitude, away from the negative, so that you can feel positive about what you can do, and enjoy life.

If we take a look at what took place before the story we read about today, we would discover that John the Baptist had been beheaded by Herod. Jesus got the news about this and was deeply grieved. He needed to get away and spend time with God, to be comforted, to find inner peace once again.

If you are like me, you know that it's hard to give your full attention to a task or a person when you are consumed with pain and worry. It is very difficult, many times impossible to do God's work effectively and completely, with love and with care, when we are exhausted or suffering emotionally or spiritually.

Jesus got away from it all. But, it didn't take long for people to catch wind of what happened and to find where Jesus went. They went to find him, and find him, they did. Jesus saw them and knew he needed to return to them, and when he did he was filled with renewed compassion and power.

I can't imagine that his grief was gone, but in the time he had with God, he found renewed strength to heal the sick. And, he even took care of their basic need to eat by feeding 5,000 people, plus women and children, with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fishes.

One man challenged another to an all-day wood chopping contest. The challenger worked very hard, stopping only for a brief lunch break. The other man had a leisurely lunch and took several breaks during the day. At the end of the day, the challenger was surprised and annoyed to find that the other fellow had chopped substantially more wood than he had.

"I don't get it," he said. "Every time I checked, you were taking a rest, yet you chopped more wood than I did."

"But you didn't notice," said the winning woodsman, "that I was sharpening my ax when I sat down to rest."

Now, I don't anticipate any of us being asked to feed over 5,000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish. But, we can be expected to do what we can to live faithful lives, to share care and love with others, to live our lives as examples of what it looks like to be a Christian. This is a big deal and very important to helping God build the kingdom. God can renew us and give us power to live as we are called to live, when we rest in him, and "sharpen our axes" while you rest, if you will. So, take time to rest in God. Connect with God, and you will be empowered to live faithful lives. Amen.