

Conflicting Messages

Mark 6:30–34, 53–56

"Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile."

That's what Jesus says to his disciples in this Sunday's Gospel lesson.

They've just come back from a successful mission trip. They've been preaching the good news of the Kingdom, healing the sick, casting out demons. When they report all these things to Jesus, he suggests that they get away for some rest because it is tiring to build the Kingdom of God.

Jesus is telling us to balance the inward journey with the outward journey, the doing with the renewing. We know action requires reflection and restoration. You cannot serve everybody; there will always be more need. We need to rest and not just for two weeks out of the year. It is not a nice suggestion, it is a lifesaving instruction.

The deserted places are often the places we avoid and yet know somewhere deep down they are necessary places, truthful places. They are not just "time to get away" places. They are not just "we all need a break" places. They force us to recognize what's necessary. What's absolutely needed. And who will truly be there when everyone else walks away. And so Jesus takes his disciples to a deserted place not for a well-deserved respite but to teach them what he learned in the wilderness -- and what will be essential for them to remember when it comes to their role in bringing about the Kingdom of God.

But there is no rest for the weary in this story. A crowd follows Jesus, greets him on the far shore of the sea, and he has compassion on them because they are "like sheep without a shepherd."

There seems to be a contradiction between what Jesus says "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile" and what Jesus does when he has compassion on the crowd and teaches, feeds, and heals the crowd. What can we learn from this contradiction?

We need to learn the difference between following Jesus and trying to be Jesus, who is God in human form. We all need rest and renewal. We need to balance the inward journey (time spent in a deserted place with God) and the outward journey (time spent showing compassion on those in need).

Jesus is not saying you need a break or every once in a while you need rest (which is true). Jesus is saying the disciples need to spend some time listening to God.

Is there any good news for the weary? Have you ever felt like a sheep without a shepherd? Do you ever try to do too much? Do you ever feel like you've got to do it, or it won't get done? Maybe we need to take more time at the feet of Jesus and listen to what Jesus has to say. Our value is not based on what we have done. Our worth is based on the truth that each of us is a child of God, called and claimed, filled and sent out to tell others what we have seen and heard. We're in this together to further God's reign on earth. It's not about the biggest and best, but all God's lost sheep gathered together with a compassionate God who will not let us go.

What are those deserted places that make you see, make you hear, make you realize what you didn't before about God, about faith, about having compassion?

Think about it – Pray about it – Live it

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