

Compassionate Rest

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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The apostles had returned to Jesus after being sent out two by two to proclaim the repentance of sins. They had cast out many demons and anointed with oil those who were sick and healed them. And while we aren't told why they came back, from the verses that come just before our text, as we heard in last week's Gospel, it may have had something to do with the beheading of John the Baptist. The reports of which could've caused concern for the apostles who would've returned in sadness. Yet they shared with Jesus all that they had done and taught. Excited about how the Kingdom of God had grown and yet still sadden because of the loss of John the Baptist who also had preached repentance.

People who hadn't considered Jesus all that important just a short time ago now listened and followed what Jesus had to say. Where Jesus and His disciples were, the crowds gathered. Many people were still coming and going - being ministered to - that they didn't talk about the day or plan for the next day, let alone have time to eat. So Jesus compassionately says to them, ***"Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while."*** And they got in a boat to get away for a while, to rest by themselves.

Jesus recognized how important it was for them to rest. Just like He knows how important it is for us to take a break as well. God made the Sabbath day for us to rest and it's good to be able to get away and recharge from time to time. Many people are doing exactly that this summer. Getting away to rest and recharge a little before the fall when schools resume, and people return to work.

Because let's face it, in our daily lives, we don't always take the time to properly rest. After all, our sinful nature would have us believe there's never enough time, so we need to strive for as much as possible. And, as some might reason, if we're not working on something every day, we won't be able to measure up to the standards that the world has set for us. But Jesus also reminds us in our text for today that we also need to allow our physical bodies to recharge. Just like Jesus did from time to time when He walked this earth.

Maybe you've heard this story before, but there was once a man who 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 both surprised and annoyed to find that the other man 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."* The winning woodsman replied, *"While you were busy chopping, you probably didn't notice but I was also sharpening my ax every time I sat down to rest."*

Now, as our text shares with us, they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. They must've done so at a leisurely pace because our text also tells us that many saw them going and ran by foot from all the towns and surrounding countryside to get there when they arrived. And so, when they got to that desolate place, there was already a great crowd waiting for them. They were like sheep without a shepherd, so Jesus began to teach them many things. And as it got late the disciples urged Jesus to send the crowds away so that they might get something to eat. But Jesus replied, ***"You give them something to eat."*** Likely surprised by His answer, and thinking that it would be too expensive to do so, according to our text, the apostles asked Him, ***"Shall we go and buy 200 denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?"***

But Jesus asks them, ***“How many loaves do you have? Go and see.”*** Five loaves of bread and two fish. It seemed they didn’t have much. So Jesus, full of compassion for them, told them to sit down in groups on the green grass. And after they did so - in groups of hundreds and fifties - He took the loaves and fish and looking up to heaven, He said a blessing. Then He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples so that they might distribute them to the people. 5,000 men ate and were satisfied that day. And when it was over, there were 12 baskets of leftovers.

While it might sound miraculous to us that so many people could eat and be satisfied from five loaves of bread and two fish, we shouldn’t lose sight of what motivated our Lord. Just like His first miracle at Cana of Galilee, His compassionate care for them brought about the miracle. He knew that it was getting late. He knew that people would eventually get hungry, and yet He doesn’t want to turn anyone away. And so, out of His great care and compassion, He provides for them just as He provides for us as well.

You see our Lord Jesus is compassionate to care for us. He wants us to be able to rest from time to time and provides for our needs. So much so that Jesus would take our place on the cross, allow for His very body and blood to be shed on the cross, so that He might provide the forgiveness we so desperately need in our lives when we repent of our sins. And while we might marvel at His resurrection, it’s only through His death and resurrection, that He compassionately provides eternal life to all who believe in Him.

That’s why when we gather together for worship, not only do we confess our sins, but we also receive His forgiveness. His Word is present to teach us. And when we come together to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, it isn’t just a remembrance meal, but we receive His very body and blood – in, with, and under – the bread and the wine. In doing so, not only do we receive sustenance for our body but more importantly, we receive sustenance for our soul. You see, Jesus is the one who renews us with His miraculous care and compassion.

He is the one who we see, hear, and taste when we gather together in Holy communion...

You know the other day I came across a story of a monk who found a precious stone, a precious jewel. After he found it, he met a traveler, who said that he was hungry and begged the monk to share with him anything that he might have. But when the monk opened his bag, all that was in there was the precious stone. The traveler saw the stone and repeatedly asked the monk if he could have it. And surprisingly, the monk gave the man the stone. Overjoyed with his new possession, the man quickly left the monk in a new direction. But after a few days, the man came back looking for the monk. After finding him, the man gave the stone back to him and said, *"Thank you for that precious stone, but I would like something more valuable. I would like the ability that enabled you to give me that precious stone in the first place."*

Refreshed during our worship and communion service, we receive the ability to be the hands and feet of Jesus. It comes out of the care and compassion that we receive from our Lord Himself so that His Kingdom might grow in and through us, reaching more people. People who might listen to His Word, repent of their sin and return to Him so that they might receive rest for their body and soul. Because without Him, we are all like sheep without a shepherd, running and searching after anything and everything that might satisfy our wants and needs. This often leads to disappointment and sadness.

While sin and evil do exist in this world, our battle isn't against flesh and blood but against the ruler, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Eph 6:12). And while we might experience sadness in our lives from time to time, God's Word tells us that Jesus cares for us and compassionately provides for all our needs of body and soul. It's in Him that we receive rest. May you always receive the care and compassion of our Lord Jesus and live with Him in His Kingdom, both now and always. In Jesus' name, Amen.