

What We Do to Recharge

John 6:1-21 (& Mark 6:30-34, 53-56)

2 Samuel 11:1-15 | Psalm 145:10-19 | Ephesians 3:14-21

St. Columba's, Zoom *Pentecost IX, Year B*

July 25, 2021 – The Rev. Ari Wolfe

[Transcript]

Today's gospel reading opens with Jesus getting in a boat with his disciples and crossing from where the crowds were thick, to a more restful place across the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). But the rabbi and his disciples have attracted a lot of attention. According to the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), they arrive with their teacher in a boat on what should have been a deserted shore, only to find that many people in the crowd they had rowed away from recognized them as they were leaving, figured out where they must be going and hurried on foot to arrive ahead of them. Jesus has compassion for the people who have so diligently come, and he teaches them. Then he sees that his students are exhausted, and invites them to, "come away to a deserted place and rest a while." Today's reading from John confirms that "Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples." We next find two well-known stories: *The Feeding of the Five Thousand* (also known as *Loaves and Fishes*), and a story about *Jesus Calming a Storm*, where he walks on water to help his students who are in distress.

Often in *exegetical work* - in delving into the meanings within scripture and pulling out important themes and elements - scholars look at what is called *Chiastic structure*, the way many scriptural stories are constructed or mapped. If you've ever deconstructed poetry forms or music, you will be familiar with looking at A, B, and C phrases or stanzas, and the ways they can relate to each other. In today's reading, the structure is "A-B-C-B-A"...you can imagine it in a chart or picture, with C in the middle, then B next to it on either side, and A on the outsides. The breakdown looks like this:

A: Jesus and his disciples in a boat on the Sea of Galilee

B: Jesus and the disciples up on a mountain to escape the crowds

C, at the center, is feeding a crowd of 5,000 people on a few fish and loaves of bread

Back to B: up on a mountain to escape the crowds

Back to A: a boat on the Sea of Galilee (this time with the disciples in the boat and Jesus walking on water through a storm to meet them.

It can be easy to focus on the more well-known *sign-* or *miracle* stories, with their miraculous events that have figured so large in many people's Christian journeys; but I feel they are often covered and I wanted to focus on what called to me when I looked through a more contemplative lens.

Sometimes, the everyday ordinary things can tell more of the story... it's a lot like watching a movie you've seen before, and noticing things going on in the background or off to the sides, that you hadn't caught before... and for me, this is where I find the Jesus I can best relate to. Setting aside the *Loaves and Fishes* for a moment, the underlying message in the bracketing parts of the story - the pieces that come before and after - is about what we do to **recharge**, and how important it is to do so. It's about finding ways in our daily moment-to-moment lives to connect with God, so that, as a friend pointed out, "we don't just get to Sunday and crash."

In Mark's account, which is a little more detailed, Jesus says to his disciples, "come away to a deserted place *all by yourselves*, and rest a while." I picture this scene:

The boat pulling up to the shore.

The disciples and Jesus: exhausted from their travels, from teaching, from healing, from caring for so many;

A crowd of *thousands*, eagerly watching the boat as it approaches...

The authors of the Gospel According to Mark tell us that, "as Jesus went ashore, he saw a great crowd, (a *multitude*) of people¹; and he had compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd..." and he ministered to them. Jesus next finds a way to feed over 5,000 people with a few loaves of bread and two fish, then disburses the crowd and has his disciples get back in the boat and go on ahead of him to the next town. We're then told that, "after leaving them, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself." Or as the Gospel According to *Mark* puts it, HE WENT UP ON A MOUNTAINSIDE TO PRAY²." In my notes,

¹ ASV, ERV & other translations

² NIV translation. I liked the phrasing, "a mountainside better than, "the mountain."

that last bit is all in caps, so that I don't forget to add emphasis: "***He Went Up On A Mountainside (by himself) To Pray.***"

In-between teaching, healing, and making the impossible happen, Jesus knows that he needs quiet rest and reconnection to God to sustain him. **This is how Jesus recharged.**

We can get so enthralled and excited by hearing the more well-known or seemingly more important scriptural stories, that we forget another important message Jesus tried to convey to his students: "**take care of yourselves.**" We forget this... A LOT. I have preached about it before and it's why I am sharing it with you again now; this is important: If we are to help others, we need to take care of **ourselves**. We need to make time to connect with God; to rest, to feed our spirits; to let God replenish us... We need *downtime*. We need *prayer*. We need *sabbath*. We need things that feed our spirits. This is one of the lessons that has been driven home to me repeatedly throughout our year-and-more of Covid pandemic social distancing and sheltering in place: self-care is **essential**, especially in times of high stress, anxiety or crisis: we need to make the time to recharge.

Theophilus of Antioch, a Syrian saint and bishop who lived during the second century,³ said:

God has given to the earth the breath that feeds it.

God's breath vibrates in yours, in your voice.

It is the breath of God that you breathe⁴.

Jesus had his disciples go off to a deserted place where they could sit or maybe walk quietly, breathe, pray... and just **be** with God, with him, and with each other for a while. **You are here now.** You are my community, my siblings-in-Christ, my fellow *disciples*; the group I try to practice these things with and amongst. So, I ask you now to join me in creating a brief space of sabbath together.

Take a moment to get comfortable... close your eyes if you would like, or find a spot to softly focus on.

³ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Theophilus-of-Antioch>

⁴ Theophilus of Antioch, excerpted from Daily Prayer for All Seasons

God has given to the earth the breath that feeds it.

Take a deep breath slowly in, and as you let it out, let go of any tensions or worries about what the day might bring, what you need to do after church, what will or won't get done... let us be fully here in this virtual chapel space, present together, at rest. **Breathe in** deeply and feel God's presence and compassion;

God's breath vibrates in yours, in your voice.

Breathe out concerns, tensions, stress... let it go out of you, with a sigh. **Breathe in** and let the Spirit fill you, recharge you, energize you; breathe out and let go. This is sabbath time, and

it is the breath of God that you breathe.

Feel the love and compassion you are surrounded by, the sense of rest and calm; hold onto this; take it with you.

Jesus recharged through prayer, meditation and rest. He took time to go away from everyone - even those closest to him - and rejuvenate his body, mind and spirit through contemplative prayer. This is an essential, nurturing way to care for ourselves and can be important in maintaining or establishing our connection with the divine, life-giving force that surrounds, imbues and sustains us. It is also important to acknowledge that sometimes, quiet meditation and physical rest are not ALL we need, even as a sabbath. Jesus - in addition to taking a lot of time to pray and meditate, and to be in quiet, still space just with God - spend a lot of time walking from one place to the next; and he preached and healed and was present with people, and brought the Spirit among them.

I read a short article this morning in The Guardian that I found inspiring:

At 71, Joan Macdonald's health was not good. She had kidney problems, high cholesterol, acid reflux, high blood pressure, and a lot more weight than was comfortable or healthy for her - and as she got worse, her doctor's suggestion was to double her medication. Instead, with the help of her daughter who is a fitness coach,

she did some deep soul-searching and began - very slowly and carefully - to lift weights; very light weights at first, but then increasing as she went.

In less than a year, Joan completely changed her physical health, her emotional wellbeing, and her sense of herself. At 75 years old, she is now happy and healthy - and a body-builder. She's amazing. She says it took her 55 years to "wake up" to what she needed. The article is called, "A New Start After 60" and is posted on The Guardian's website - I'll share a link in the chat box⁵.

We need to care for and nurture ourselves; we need sabbath. It can be planned out ahead of time... a day off work, a weekend away; time in the mountains or by the ocean; a camping trip.

It can be brief and simple: Reading a line of scripture or prayer in the middle of a busy day; taking a mindful walk through your neighborhood or a park, focusing on the beauty that God has created...

It can be slower movement like Tai Chi or yoga, or very active such as sports we participate in or even bodybuilding, like Joan Macdonald. It can be something we do entirely alone or with others, calm or active... but **whatever form it takes, we need it**. We need to reconnect, recharge, renew our energy, so that we have it to sustain us and to share with and sustain those we love and care about.

I leave you with the words of our epistle today, from Paul's letter to the Ephesians:
***"...be strengthened in your inner being with power through His Spirit...
you are being rooted and grounded in love."***

⁵ The Guardian, *A New Start After 60* [<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/jul/23/a-new-start-after-60-i-was-sick-tired-and-had-lost-myself-until-i-took-up-bodybuilding-at-71>]