

Rest *From* and *For*
Mark 6:30–46
Sunday, June 15, 2025 (Trinity)

Let us pray: Quiet our minds, still our spirits, that we might hear and receive your Word and be nourished by it, in Christ. Amen.

Today is Trinity Sunday. We just finished the season of Easter, where we celebrate Jesus Christ as the resurrected Son of God. Then last week we celebrated Pentecost and the coming of God's Holy Spirit. And this week we bring all of that together and celebrate God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We often talk on this day about how God is three persons, living together as one, and we, who are many, are called to live together as one; that the Trinity calls us to live life together, in loving community, as God does.

But today is also my last Sunday before being on sabbatical for three months. So I thought that today would be a good day to talk about *sabbath* and *rest*. There are some things that scripture talks about over and over again – themes that are central to who *God* is and who God calls *us* to be – and sabbath is one of those. The word *sabbath* is used almost 200 times in scripture (more than that if you include all the times it simply talks about *rest*. It is the fourth commandment – *commandment*, not a *suggestion* by God; God *commands* us to observe the sabbath just as God commands us not to kill, steal, commit adultery, and lie.

So these two things – the Trinity and sabbath – I was back and forth on which one to focus on today. Have you ever seen the commercial where this family is arguing about which kind of tacos to have for dinner? Some of them want hard shell tacos, while others want soft tacos, and then this little girl says, “Why not *both*?” and they all celebrate and raise her up on their shoulders. That's how I feel. The Trinity or sabbath? Why not *both*? (You can raise me up on

your shoulders later.) These are two things that we don't typically talk about together, but they actually have a lot to do with one another. Because as every parent of toddlers will tell you, it is a whole lot easier to live life together and love one another after nap time.

Jesus understood this. That is why he was constantly going off by himself to rest and pray; we see him doing that over and over again in the gospels. And he calls his followers to do the same. Look at how our scripture today reading starts off. It says, "The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught." At the beginning of this chapter, Jesus had sent his disciples out in teams of two to go into the surrounding villages and spread his message. They taught and healed people and cast out demons. They've been working hard. So now they come back to Jesus, tell him all about it, and the first thing he says is, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For, it says, "many people were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat." They've been so busy that they can't even stop to eat. So now it's time for a nap and a snack.

They all pile into a boat and go off to a deserted place, away from the crowds. But the crowds follow them, and they're there waiting for Jesus and the disciples when they get to the other side. We don't know how long they were out on the water; maybe they got some rest out there. But imagine how frustrating that was. They've been working so hard, they can't even get a break to *eat*, and now that they're finally getting some time to rest, the crowds are *right there*.

Imagine that you have been working really hard doing whatever (your job, yard work, housework, cooking), and you finally sit down to take a break, and someone comes into the room or calls you and is like, "Hey, can you come help me do this?" (Those of you who are mothers have no idea what I'm talking about.) When that happens, it is really easy to get frustrated and

crabby. “I *just* sat down to take a break. Can’t you give me a minute?” That’s essentially what happens to Jesus and the disciples here. They go off to take a break, and as soon as they get to the other side, people are like, “Hey, can you help us?” It probably would have been really easy for Jesus and the disciples to get frustrated there. But, it says, Jesus sees the crowd and has *compassion* for them.

Rest helps us to have compassion for others.

When we get stressed, tired, overwhelmed, or anxious, it becomes much harder to be compassionate. We more easily get frustrated and short with people. But Jesus was *constantly* going away by himself to pray and reconnect with God and be renewed. And that allowed him to be more compassionate; to love *others* because he is consistently being renewed and replenished by God’s love.

When *we* take time to reconnect with God and be renewed and replenished by God’s love, *we* are better able to love *others*. We *rest* so that we can have *compassion*. There is all kinds of pain in this world that could be healed by us just being more compassionate toward one another. More patient, more understanding, more loving. But we are all so stressed, tired, overwhelmed, and anxious that our ability to be compassionate is depleted. And we get the world that we see around us today.

Maybe the best way for us to be compassionate in this world is to take a break, put down the phone, get off the Internet, turn off the news, and go out for a ten-minute walk, or read a book, or play with a cat or a dog, draw something, paint something, knit something, listen to music, *play* music, get your hands dirty in a garden, eat something that makes you happy, sit outside and

listen to the birds, close your eyes, pray, or just take a nap. Whatever helps you reconnect with God and this world and yourself. Jesus calls us to come away with him and rest a while. Whatever that looks like for you, God can use it to rejuvenate and renew you and make you more compassionate. Even the slightest bit of rest helps Jesus to be compassionate, and from that place of compassion, he feeds and nourishes 5,000 people.

Now, whenever I talk about sabbath and the importance of rest, it always reminds me of the retired widower who came up to me years ago after a sermon on sabbath, and he said, “Rest from *what*? I don’t *do* anything. My problem isn’t that I need more rest or more quiet time by myself. My problem is that I spend *too much time* by myself. I need *more* to do.” Sabbath is not just about sitting around and doing nothing by yourself all day. It’s about breaking up the day-to-day rhythms and routines of life that we can often become slaves to. So maybe for that man (or for *you*), sabbath looks like being intentional about calling a friend and talking for a while or going out to lunch or even just going for a walk around the neighborhood or somewhere like a store or the mall where you can just walk around and be around people.

It also reminds me of the dairy farmer who came up to me after a sermon on sabbath and said, “That’s great, but my cows aren’t going to feed and milk themselves.” He told me about how he had to get up every single day before sunrise, seven days a week, 365 days a year, regardless of how tired he was or if he was sick or hurt. That he *couldn’t* go on vacation with his family – he couldn’t leave the farm for more than a few hours at a time – because who was going to take care of the chores and all the cows? Taking a day off to rest was something that was simply not possible for him.

And we might feel the same way. “I *can’t* drop everything to go out to lunch with a friend. I *can’t* take a day off, because there is so much to do, and if I don’t do it, it’s all going to fall apart.” This is why it is important to remember *why* God calls us to sabbath.

After the people of Israel are set free from slavery in Egypt, God says to them in Exodus, “Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.”

And then the command is restated a little differently in the book of Deuteronomy, “Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.”

So in Exodus, the rationale for sabbath was that if *God* can stop working and just *be* for a day, and the universe doesn’t fall apart, then it won’t fall apart when *you* take a break, either. And in Deuteronomy, the rationale is that the people of Israel were slaves in Egypt and never got a day off, so the sabbath is meant to remind them that they are not slaves anymore. In all of this, sabbath rest is meant to remind us that we are not defined by what we *do*. Our worth is not based

on what we *produce*. Our value and our worth come from the fact that we are *children* of God, created in the *image* of God, who have been *redeemed* by God and are *sustained* by God.

Pastor and author Rich Villodas writes that, “Sabbath is not a *reward* for hard work. It is a reminder that our work will remain incomplete. It is a day that moves us from *production* to *presence*. It reminds us that we are not God. And it points us to the deeper rest that we need in Christ.”

Sabbath is a reminder that life does not depend on *us*. That *God* is in control, ruling and reigning over heaven and earth; that God is holding it all together. And sabbath is an invitation to trust that God will provide for our needs. That’s one of the things behind *my* sabbatical. This past week I worked *so hard* to make sure that everything was in place for me to be gone for three months. I was running around *frantically* trying to make sure everyone had everything they needed and knew exactly what they needed to do. But I *know* that there’s no way I thought of everything. And I just have to trust that it’s going to be okay.

Sabbaticals are a reminder that the life of the church does not *depend* on the *pastor*. It depends on Jesus Christ, and he is not going anywhere. Jesus will give you all everything you need to be his church. This sabbatical is not just about *me*. The hope is that this time of rest will renew and deepen my compassion and love for *you* – and *yours* for *me* – so that we can continue sharing life and ministry together for many more years.

Sabbath is never just for ourselves as individuals. It is for the betterment of community. Maybe that’s why in the Ten Commandments, the first four commandments are about our love for *God*, and the last six commandments are about our love for *each other*, and it is this command to

sabbath that bridges them. Because taking time to rest and be renewed by God helps us to better love one another. Jesus regularly took time to commune with God and the Holy Spirit, and that made it possible for him to feed and nourish others. In that same way, *we* are called to take time to commune with the Triune God, so that *we* can be nurtured in our compassion and love for others. So let's take a moment and just *be* with God...