

Eight Sunday after Pentecost, July 18, 2021
“Give Me a Break” (Mark 6:30-34)

No doubt, everyone here knows what it is like to be bone-tired, to be at the point of total exhaustion. Such complete weariness could be from physical activity, like a long, hard day of work. Or it could be that we are emotionally drained from investing our heart and soul in a particular event or situation.

Over the years, I have found that, for me, youth events have been particularly exhausting – especially trips to the National Youth Gathering. Dianne can tell you that we easily logged over fifty miles on foot at the last Gathering in Houston. However, the youth gathering that stands out for being the most tiring for me was the one to St. Louis. And I was still a fairly young man at that point.

Susan and I stumbled out of bed at 2:00 on that Wednesday morning in July of 2000 so we would be at the church by 3:30. When all twenty participants were present and accounted for, we made the two-hour drive to the Raleigh-Durham airport for our 6:30 flight. After a short layover in Charlotte, we arrived in St. Louis around 9:00. We waited a half hour or so for the hotel’s shuttle van and were transported to our assigned hotel. Because it was still fairly early, we couldn’t check into our rooms. So we hung out by the pool for a while, were later shuttled to and from a restaurant for lunch, and then hung out by the pool some more.

When we were finally able to check in, I barely had enough time to deposit my luggage before a mandatory counselors’ meeting. When that was over, we had to leave for the first night’s worship event at the TWA Dome. Since our hotel was not in St. Louis, but in Earth City, the commute would take some time. We boarded a shuttle bus that took us to the MetroLink train station, about 20 minutes away. There we boarded the train and rode another 45 minutes to the convention center, where we registered and received our backpacks. When we found a food court and sat down for an early dinner, I didn’t know if I could get back up. I had been awake for almost 16 hours, and the evening was young.

Around 7:00, we filed into the Dome. I was so happy that I could sit for a while for a short respite. But when things got cranked up, we all forgot all about how tired we were. The night’s worship – with its praise music, skits, and inspiring speakers – renewed and recharged us. Or so we thought.

When the service concluded around 9:00, we, along with 25,000 others, poured out into the streets. Many made their way to the MetroLink station to catch the train back to the hotels. It usually takes a day or two for the hosting city – in conjunction with the Gathering staff – to become efficient in moving that many people. As a result, we waited for over an hour, becoming more tired and irritable with each passing minute. And we would have been there another hour or two if not for a maneuver orchestrated by my wife. She led us past the entrance and in through the exit. Moving against the crowd, we made our way to the platform and was soon on a train, packed like sardines, heading back to Earth City. Forty-five minutes later, we boarded the shuttle bus for the last leg of our journey. It was now around 11:00.

To our dismay, the shuttle driver didn't know where our hotel was. So that 20 minute drive took an hour. But finally, at midnight we pulled into the parking lot of our hotel, and stumbled to our rooms. Most of us had now been awake for 22 hours and were completely exhausted. But before going to bed, we had a short meeting to prepare for the next day. When I told the group we had to be on the bus by 8:30, there was a collective groan. That groan was saying, *Give me a break. We need some rest.*

Again, every one of us here can relate. We've all been to the point of total exhaustion, whether from a long, hard day of work, a sleepless night, the demands of our family's schedule, or dealing with some crisis that has arisen. When we get that tired, that weary, something's got to give. We need a break! We need to be renewed, recharged, re-energized.

Jesus knew this, as well. He knew it was important for people to get away from time to time. Earlier, Jesus had sent his apostles out two by two. They had been preaching and teaching and healing, generally ministering to the public. And they were tired. Still, the crowds were so insistent – so many people coming and going – that they had no time even to eat. So Jesus suggested that they get away from the crowds for a while and take some time to rest. They, too, were saying, *Give me a break*”

Mark tells us that they left in a boat for a quieter spot. Like us, they could only perform their tasks for so long before taking some time for themselves. You see, our lives were designed for balance. This is a concept many of us overlook, but one to which we should pay attention.

As you know, for a number of years in the Wild West, mail was dispatched across the country by a relay system known as the Pony Express. Occasionally, an express rider would be attacked by Native Americans. But because his horse was stronger than the Native American ponies, the rider could spur his horse to a gallop and outrun his attackers before his horse would tire. But pretty soon, the Native Americans changed their plan of attack. Realizing they couldn't outrun the express rider, they wisely stationed some of their number every few miles along the route. Then, just when the rider had outrun the first group of attackers, the second band would appear, causing him to spur his horse on without rest. This tactic was repeated until, at last, the rider's horse would collapse from exhaustion.

Sometimes, we are like those Pony Express horses. We get one crisis resolved and here comes another. If it's not a situation with our child, it is an aging parent needing our attention. If it's not a medical emergency, it's an expensive car repair. If it's not a family function we're expected to attend, it's an office party, a baby shower, a birthday party, or dinner with friends. If it's not our job demanding more of us, it's the church or another organization asking for our time and energy. Work, family, friends, church, community, and so many other things demanding our attention. One stressful thing after another. We can only do so much before we give out. Therefore, we have to plan balance in our lives.

God worked six days and rested on the seventh. And he built into his creation day and night. The day was for working, the night for resting. But modern humanity is not content with that. We pack so much into our days, knowing that if we don't accomplish everything, we still have the night to get them done. And I culture is happy to assist. Take grocery shopping for example. If I

don't make it to the grocery store today, I can easily find one that's open late into the evening – or perhaps all night. I can squeeze my shopping in then.

Our world is buzzing with activity 24 hours a day, but the “convenience” this offers can be a physical or emotional strain on us.

We were not created to go 24 and 7. We were created for balance: for working and relaxing, for business and for family, for socializing and spending time alone with God. Any time our life gets out of balance, we pay a price. We become tired, stressed out, and worn down. In our gospel text, Jesus models for us a life of balance. He knows that, after a while, we simply need to get away. We need a break.

One of the greatest needs each of us has is to spend some one-on-one time with God. Jesus, we know, was deliberate about doing this and, today, we see him encouraging his disciples to do the same. Jesus knew that, without rest, his apostles could not be efficient in the mission he was giving them. They could not be effective ministers for God in the world without taking some time to allow God to minister to them.

This is the problem many of us face. Like the disciples, we can become so busy in saving the world and caring for others that we neglect our own need to spend time in a quiet place communing with God. And if we don't give God the opportunity to speak to us, if we don't know how to be still and listen, how can we expect to manage our overflowing calendars or shoulder the burdens that come our way? Without giving God time to recharge us with spiritual energy and strength, how can we be effective witnesses of the gospel?

Jesus calls us to draw aside to a quiet place where we can communicate with God; to block out our busy world and open our hearts to the Father. What we will find is that our darkened world of disappointments, trials, stress, and anxiety will soon be illuminated. During those quiet times, we will be able to sense God's presence in our lives and be assured of his provision for us. And that's something we all need.

In addition to praising God, one of the reasons we worship each week is for the refreshment of our spirits. It is a time to shut out the world and focus our attention on God's presence and activity in our lives. That's why that Wednesday night worship service in St. Louis was such a wonderful experience. All the stress and weariness of such a long day dissipated as 25,000 worshippers entered into communion with God and experienced his presence in our lives.

Jesus know we often need a break and places value on getting away from it all for a while. Because we were created for balance, he encourages us to build into our lives a natural rhythm of work and worship. stress and leisure, being with others and finding a place of solitude. So, take a break today and let the love and power of God renew and re-energize you. It can make all the difference.