

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56 ³⁰The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³²And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things... ⁵³And when they had again crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, ⁵⁵and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

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"Come Apart So As To Not Come Apart"

Rev. Amy Terhune

Each year the National Park Service receives suggestions from guests on how they might better serve people visiting those parks. Here are some actual suggestions and comments they have received. I'll let you decide which of them have some merit:

"Many trails need to be reconstructed. Please avoid building ones that go uphill."

"Too many bugs and leeches and spider webs. Please spray wilderness areas to rid them of these pests."

"The coyotes made too much noise last night and kept me awake. Please eradicate these annoying animals."

"I like all the trees but you need to plant some flowers. Flower gardens would be so pretty in the forest."

"The giant trees are spectacular but there are too many of the same kind; you should plant different types, for variety."

"You should have a petting zoo here so that the children could touch the squirrels, deer and bears." Bears? For the kids? Really?

"Reflectors need to be placed on the trees every 50 feet so people could hike at night with flashlights." What could go wrong there?. And here's my favorite:

"Escalators would help on steep uphill areas of the hiking trails." [from The Daily Dilly, <http://www.dobhran.com>; as used in "Shall We Take the Escalator?" by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.]

I'm trying to picture Isle Royale with escalators. Maybe you can ride uphill with a moose on the steps in front of you. Personally, I prefer to leave them as untouched by humankind as possible. All of need places to get away. Earlier this week, I published on Facebook a piece by Wendell Barry called "The Peace of Wild Things". He writes:

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought

of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and I am free.

[By Wendell Barry, <https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poem/peace-wild-things-0/>]

I like that. Many of us go to nature when despair for the world grows within. Or we go to a book, a movie, a night out, a weekend away, a quiet bath, a moment alone in the bathroom. We put the kids to bed, we send our spouse on an errand, we take that time in the car on the way home from work to just breathe. And hopefully, we find a few minutes, maybe even a half hour, to turn off the TV, close the door, shut our eyes, and meet God in prayer. Because we need that time to find our own center again when the strings that tug the various pieces of our lives seem to pull in every direction.

To come apart. It means to take one thing and break it down into smaller pieces or sections. We need to come apart from the world, because we are not the whole world, and the whole world is not us. We need to come apart so as to not come apart. When dealing with things like Legos, a tent, a large piece of furniture, the ability to come apart is a good thing. It enables it to be moved easily from one place to another, or reshaped into something else (in the case of Legos). But human beings are not made to come apart. We are one being – body, mind, and spirit. Sadly, it has become practice for many of us to compartmentalize our roles, our thinking, our very lives. On one level, it's necessary. I remember going back to work after Catharine was born. I had to learn to shelve my own anxieties and desires in order to effectively pastor a church. And when I went home at night, I had to learn to leave church at church so that I could be present to my daughters and my husband. Most of the time, I do okay at it. Sometimes, I really don't. And sometimes one of my roles informs and augments another. And sometimes one role hampers another. This is the balancing act most of us learn.

But sometimes, we compartmentalize to our detriment. One of the biggest lies told was coined by some advertising agency. It says, "what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas". Not that everyone who goes to Vegas has something to hide. But the idea that what one does for a weekend away won't matter – won't affect a marriage, or financial obligations, or moral integrity – is ludicrous. They sell a good time with the promise of no consequences. It's a lie. Human beings aren't made to come apart. But knowing the pressure, God made human beings to need rest. It's built into our day when we sleep. If we're people of faith, it's built into our week to take a day of sabbath for worship, rest, prayer, and relationship building with friends and family.

In our scripture lesson this morning, Jesus says to his disciples, "Come apart, come rest awhile". According to the text, the disciples have just returned from their first 'tours of duty'. They've gone out two by two to teach and heal, and now they are reporting in. They've seen God move in amazing ways. They've also face rejection, derision, and hostility. Shake the dust from your feet and move on – that's what we heard Jesus tell them last week, but you and I both know that's easier said than done. Moreover, we learn, immediately prior to this lesson, about the arrest and beheading of John the Baptist. The emotional trauma of losing a colleague, friend, cousin, and fellow worker for the Kingdom is an ominous ending to their first mission. If they weren't already, they're now uncomfortably aware that the ministry they've been out there doing has some fairly serious risks involved, especially if one is forced to speak the truth to one in power.

So Jesus calls them apart. One of the reasons Jesus does this is to tend to the most basic human needs of our bodies. Do you remember the story of Elijah from I Kings? He was a mighty prophet who faced a weak king and wicked queen named Jezebel. She really was a nasty piece of work. She was a Phoenician who worshiped the God Ba'al. This in itself one could live with, but she

was the Queen of Israel, and she saw it as her mission to wipe out worship of God, forget the laws of Moses, and institute her own religion in Israel. And she was pretty ruthless about it. Elijah faced off against 400 of her priests of Ba'al, and won – burnt all 400 of them to a crisp – which humiliated Jezebel in public, so she put a hefty price on his head. Which is how it comes to pass that on the heels of a huge spiritual victory, Elijah has to flee for his life, staggers out into the wilderness where he begs God to just let him die. He's come apart at the seams. Nobody can last like that. And the angel of God comes to Elijah, this great man of faith who has stood up for God all by himself against the arrayed political might of Israel. And what does the angel of God say to Elijah: He says, "hey, lie down, get some sleep, here's some food, here's some water. Isn't that interesting? It's right there in I Kings 19. The first thing the angel does is tend to Elijah's body. "Sleep, eat, drink. It'll help you get your head back in the game. Trust me." And strengthened in body, Elijah has the resources to withstand the hurricane and the fire so that he can finally meet God in that sheer, deep, penetrating silence – a silence he would never hear have been able to hear or distinguish if hadn't come apart for a while to pull himself back together. Jesus knows that history – the story of his people. Come apart for a while. Sleep, eat, drink. It helps.

Now please understand something. There are plenty of times when scripture condemns the overindulgence of our comforts. Gluttony (consistent over-eating), sloth (consistent laziness, often coupled with apathy), drunkenness (becoming inebriated by alcohol) – these are when we take our human needs to unhealthy extremes. And there are plenty of times when scripture calls us to deny ourselves – to fast, pray, abstain – for a season. Jesus tells us not to worry about what we'll eat or where we'll sleep, not because these things aren't important, but because worry doesn't fix anything. We are called to empty ourselves so that God can fill us, but we are never called to drain ourselves completely. On the contrary, God promises to give strength to the weak and to sustain those who are faint. Imagine, just for a moment, what our world would be like if everyone could sleep, eat, and drink as they had need. Imagine what that alone would do for the health of humankind. Imagine what it would do for our planet. Imagine how it would impact interpersonal relationships, international diplomacy, peace-making. This isn't rocket science. It's much more basic, more fundamental.

But of course, another reason Jesus calls them apart is to tend to their spirits. Our bodies need sleep, food, drink to function. Our spirits need quiet, healing, and divine connection in order to function as they're supposed to as well. Those of us who have been wounded—who have lost loved ones to death, failed a loved one, gotten bad medical diagnoses, struggled with abuse and neglect, watched our marriage fall apart, worried terribly of a teenager gone astray, or any number of other life experiences that leave scars on our hearts, we too can find healing in time apart, time alone with God. And just as sleep can help us get over the flu or an infection, time apart with God can help us get the best of sin before it gets the best of us. Taking time apart—time away from family, job pressure, and all the others stresses that go with life—gives us a chance to take a good, hard look at ourselves. Those of us who have fallen short can find opportunity to recommit. Those of us carrying the weight of our past can find freedom.

This time is vital to our spiritual health because the strength, healing, and vision that it gifts us with enables us to return to the world and respond to its needs as Jesus did. Notice in our scripture lesson that Jesus' rest time is interrupted by those begging for healing. In part of the lesson I didn't read today, Jesus feeds 5000 people, and it isn't until nightfall when he finally gets time alone to pray and come together with God. He prays until the middle of the night, and then goes walking across the water to catch up with his disciples. In the morning, when they dock, there is once again a mass of humanity searching for Jesus' touch. That's still true. There's still a mass of humanity searching for Jesus' touch.

And yet, Jesus never got to the point where he was consumed by despair or burnout. His strength was in his compassion for others. Compassion is the etymological amalgamation of passion, which means suffering. We talk about Jesus' passion meaning his crucifixion, his suffering on behalf of humanity. Com means "with". To have compassion, then, is to suffer with another. It's more than pity or sympathy – it takes on another's suffering as our own. Jesus did that all the time. He understands our frailties, our fears, our sins, our grief because he takes it on himself. And yet, in alleviating another's suffering, he alleviated his own, too.

Here's an interesting bit of wisdom from Holland. The country of Holland is almost entirely below sea level, and so their wellbeing depends on the strength of a series of canals and dykes. "A writer in a book called *Beginnings* put it this way: "Some folks in Holland call the Sabbath 'God's Dyke.' A helpful analogy. The dyke is a protective sea wall that holds back the surging waves and allows people to live in areas that would otherwise be utterly uninhabitable. The Sabbath is like that. Just like a dyke keeps the quiet Holland farmlands from being engulfed by the Atlantic, a day of rest can keep us from being engulfed by destructive value systems and the corrosive pressures of contemporary society. Humans are such pliable creatures. Immersed in the push-and-shove of daily living, we are in danger of being squeezed into a misshapen caricature of what God intended us to become. We are in danger of fragmenting apart. The Sabbath is God's opportunity to remold us into His image, whole and holy." [from "In Praise Of Goofing Off" by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.]

There's a story for *Guideposts* years ago about a prominent lawyer named Hamilton Whaley who was involved in a simple fender-bender one day. He was unharmed, as was the other person involved in that accident, but somehow, their little accident got mixed up in the paper trail with another tragic accident in town with fatal consequences. The end result was that Hamilton Whaley awoke the next morning to read his own obituary in the city's legal journal. Any of us would find that disconcerting, but Hamilton didn't like what he read. He began to think about his legacy. What was the purpose of his life? Would anyone be better off because he had lived? In the end, he resigned his partnership at that prominent law firm, and he and his wife and his youngest son became house parents at the Bethesda Home for Boys in Savannah, Georgia, one of the oldest orphanages in the U.S. Hamilton Whaley would later write: "Now I'm where God wants me to be, in a life that began, instead of ending, with my obituary." [from *Church Management*, May/June, 1983, p. 59. First published in *Guideposts*, November 1982; as used in "Hungering for Some Time Off" by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.]

"Come apart," said Jesus, "to a deserted place. Rest awhile." Good advice. Time is not infinite for our human experience. It is short, and therefore precious. We must use our time wisely. Take the time to tend your spirit. Take the time to tend to your body. Take the time to tend to your relationships, your family and friends. Some anonymous writer offers these words:

Take time to LAUGH, it is the music of the soul.

Take time to PLAY, it is the source of perpetual youth.

Take time to READ, it is the foundation of wisdom.

Take time to PRAY, it is the greatest power on earth.

Take time to THINK, it is where you find your power to act, yet not react.

Take time to LOVE AND BE LOVED, it is a God-given privilege.

Take time to be FRIENDLY, it is the road to happiness.

Take time to GIVE, it is where we find meaning and purpose.

Take time for what BRINGS JOY, it is what will carry you through hard times.

Take time to WORK, it is the price of success.

Take time to COME APART, so as to not come apart.

Take time for GOD, it is the way of life. Amen.