

Sermons at  
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)  
Reggie Denton, Pastor

August 11, 2024 (Proper 11, Year B)  
Given 3 weeks later than assigned  
Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

In 1960, a Senate subcommittee heard expert testimony concerning time management. The experts said that because of advances in technology, within TWENTY years or so, people would be radically cutting back on how many hours a week they worked, or how many weeks a year they worked, or else they would have to start retiring SOONER. The great CHALLENGE, according to the experts of the SIXTIES, was WHAT people in OUR time would do with all our FREE time. I'm sure all of YOU are struggling with that right NOW, with all the FREE time you have, right?

In this day and age, when we're supposed to have so many devices to SAVE time, I've never seen so many people HURRIED and RESTLESS! If the computer, the laptop, the smart phone, and all of these other technological wonders are supposed to SAVE us time, why is it that we have so LITTLE of it – so LITTLE TIME for the things that MATTER?

It seems that, with all we've accomplished, about all we've really ADDED is SPEED and NOISE. We don't know where we're going, but we GET there FASTER. And WHEN we get there, we're out of breath.

We find it difficult to WAIT for ANYTHING. We grow IMPATIENT waiting for an elevator. And SOMEWHERE in our brain a little voice says, "Maybe the 5 other people waiting here FORGOT to push the button. I better push it AGAIN just to be sure." And a few seconds later the voice says, "Maybe it will come a little FASTER if I push it AGAIN." That's the SECRET you know, if you push the button AGAIN, the elevator comes FASTER.

We pace around waiting for a phone call. We start acting like caged animals waiting in line at the store. On the road, we speed up to pass a car, JUST so we can pull BACK over to get off at the next turn. Does anybody else here get some satisfaction that the guy that just ZOOMED PAST you ends up sitting NEXT to you at the next stoplight? Then you know what I mean.

One writer called it "The Paradox of Our Time." He said:

We spend more, but have less;  
we buy more, but enjoy it less.  
We have bigger houses and smaller families;  
more conveniences, but less time;  
more medicine, but less wellness.  
We read too little, watch TV too much and pray too seldom.  
We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values.  
These are the times of tall men, and short character;  
steep profits, and shallow relationships.  
These are the days of two incomes, but more divorce;  
of fancier houses, but broken HOMES.  
We've learned how to make a living, but not a life;  
we've added years to life, not life to years;  
we've cleaned up the air, but polluted the SOUL."

Some years ago (2003), my wife and I saw an example of this first-hand on a vacation. On one 4<sup>th</sup> of July, we were in Casper, Wyoming, and we watched the fireworks from the lawn of our hotel. We were sitting right next to the street that went up a hill to the main staging area for the show, and there were HUNDREDS of cars rushing up there. When the show started it was absolutely beautiful.

But I couldn't help but notice that while this awesome show of light was going on over our heads, there were STILL cars zooming back and forth on the streets. SO much beauty RIGHT over their heads, but they were too BUSY to stop and WATCH it, or maybe even NOTICE. And then, just BEFORE the grand finale, the very BEST part of the show, cars ALREADY starting coming DOWN that hill. They were leaving EARLY and missing the BEST PART. Why? To beat the rush? And I thought to myself, "What are we DOING to ourselves? We are in such a HURRY, that we can't even ENJOY life anymore."

But into our frantic world, Jesus says, "Come away to a quiet place all by yourselves and rest a while." In today's Gospel story, the disciples of Jesus were an awful lot like US — coming and going, with no chance to even sit down and EAT anything! They were TIRED. They'd been sent off by Jesus to do ministry — to preach, to teach, to heal, to cast out demons — and now they were BACK, and they wanted to TELL Jesus about everything they'd seen and done and taught. But they were continually INTERRUPTED. It was a MADHOUSE, like it ALWAYS was around Jesus.

And when Jesus LOOKED at his disciples, he could SEE the weariness and frustration in their eyes, just as I see it in YOUR eyes. Jesus knew what they NEEDED, so they escaped by boat to a QUIET place.

Did you ever notice in the Gospels how Jesus is always DOING that? Always trying to slip away to be by himself? It was intentional. He KNEW how IMPORTANT REST is. Even his Father, the CREATOR, RESTED on the seventh day. According to Exodus 31(:17), that's why God gave us the Sabbath in the FIRST place — to REMIND us that, if GOD needed a day to rest, so do we.

It's built RIGHT into the BODIES God gave us. Bill Parent, a long-distance runner, who also happens to be a Roman Catholic priest, says there's an almost universally recognized training principle for runners. A runner that trains EVERY day eventually hits a WALL, where they can't get ANY BETTER, but a runner who takes a day OFF from training each week becomes FASTER. It's called "the SABBATH PRINCIPLE," and it's built RIGHT into our bodies. We are created in God's IMAGE, and just LIKE God, we need to REST. Our bodies, and our hearts, and our SPIRITS need rest.

I'm not trying to GUILT you into something here. Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). God PUT keeping the Sabbath in the 10 commandments not because GOD needs us to do it, but because God knows that WE NEED it. The health of our bodies, our spirits, and our RELATIONSHIPS DEPENDS on taking a "time-out" to JUST BE. WITHOUT it, we SUFFER. Doctors say that to work all the time, WITHOUT rest, without a SABBATH, can lead to things like chronic fatigue, pain, depression and low energy. And if we don't TAKE the time to be WITH our families and friends, those RELATIONSHIPS suffer.

Notice I didn't say, "FIND the time." I said "TAKE the time." Take the time AWAY from something else. If you think there's some EXTRA time in your day just WAITING to be found, you NEVER WILL find it. We need to TAKE the time.

This ISN'T EASY. It wouldn't be a COMMANDMENT if it WERE easy. It takes EFFORT. It's DIFFICULT, because EVERYTHING in our culture says that we need to STAY...BUSY...ALL...THE...TIME. And if we don't, we feel GUILTY about it, like we should be DOING something.

Henri Nouwen, one of the most respected experts on pastoral care, wrote this: "Our culture has become most sophisticated in the avoidance of pain, not only our PHYSICAL pain but our EMOTIONAL and MENTAL pain as well. We have become so used to this state of anesthesia, that we PANIC when there is NOTHING or NOBODY left to DISTRACT us. When we have no project to finish, no friend to visit, no book to read, no television to watch, no record to play, and when we are left all alone by ourselves, we are brought so close to the revelation of our basic human ALONENESS, and are so afraid of experiencing an all-pervasive sense of LONELINESS, that we will do ANYTHING to get busy again, and continue the GAME which makes us believe that everything is FINE after all" (Reaching Out, pp. 16,17).

What he means is that we HIDE BEHIND our busyness. If we CONTINUE to hide ourselves, eventually, the things that matter, that keep us going, that energize us — our purpose, our self-worth, our friendships, our families — the things that are MOST PRECIOUS to us, begin to crumble, begin to die for lack of air, or, worse, lack of CARE. Like the old Energizer Bunny, we just keep going and going and going, but WE can't go on FOREVER. Sooner or later we MUST STOP. We need to RECHARGE our batteries.

And that's one of the reasons God gave us this place, why God gave us the church. We come to church to KEEP the Sabbath, TOGETHER. We come to be fed and nourished by God's Word and Sacrament. We come to find rest and refreshment in Christ. We come to teach our children about God's love. We come for the courage to care. We come to find a MOMENT of peace. We come today, to THIS SANCTUARY, to this QUIET place, to receive STRENGTH for tomorrow, the strength to go back out there.

Today Jesus says, "Take a little time." "Come away to a quiet place all by yourselves, and REST a while" (Mark 6:31).

Tomorrow the Lord will have work for us, but TODAY we rest. Take the time, and enjoy it. Amen.