

I’ve shared the story with some of you before. A woman moved to the United States from a foreign country. A few weeks in, she signs up for an ESL class to improve her English. At the beginning of the first class, the teacher asks, “How are you?” She replies with a smile, “I’m busy.” Next class, same question; same answer. And the next class. And the next. Finally, the teacher decides to ask what she’s so busy with. Turns out, she isn’t; she just thinks that’s the traditional American response to, “How are you?” Because that’s what she usually hears other people say: “I’m busy.”

I don’t know if the story is true or not. But the point it makes is. Maybe more than people in any other time or place, “busy” describes the life of your average, working American. In that necessary cycle of work, rest, repeat, rest often gets sacrificed on the altar of things that need to be done. Even when we’re taking the day off or heading on vacation, work follows us on our smartphones and laptops.

And maybe that’s why we can relate so well to the gospel lesson I’m about to read for you. “Busy” describes Jesus and the disciples in it. The disciples just got done with a work trip Jesus had sent them on. People are keeping them so occupied they don’t even have time to eat. They take off in a boat for some much needed rest. But work follows them around the shore of the lake.

Add smartphones and tablets, and it could be a scene right out of any one of our busy lives. And that’s why we need to hear it. See, Jesus wants to give his disciples rest – but as always, he’s not just concerned about the physical. He’s more concerned about giving their souls rest. Jesus doesn’t want the much needed rest he gives our souls to get lost in our busyness. Work, rest, repeat – that’s a cycle in our spiritual lives, too.

³⁰The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

³²So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

1. Work leaves us tired

The disciples had been busy working for Jesus. If you remember, last Sunday Mark shared how Jesus sent them out, two by two, to the surrounding villages to preach the good news. It was their first experience doing it – kind of like their vicar year. Only it probably didn’t last a year. A few days? Weeks? We’re not sure. But Mark tells us when they got back, they gathered around Jesus and “debriefed” – **reported to him all they had done and taught.**

How do you think that conversation went? I’m sure they carried back some exciting news they wanted to share. How, by Jesus’ authority, they had driven out demons and healed diseases. The sermons they preached, their evangelism visits in certain homes – and how some listened to and believed their message.

But I think there was more to it than that. After all, Mark says **they reported to him all they had done and taught**. So do you think they didn't just have faithful work to report...but their failures, too? Evangelism visits that should have happened but didn't. Times they should have preached but said nothing because they were scared. Times they made the miracles more about themselves than Jesus.

And it probably wasn't just a burden of failures that weighed heavy on their hearts – fear, too. Mark tells us that John the Baptist has just been beheaded. Remember, he preached the same thing the disciples did on this journey! Do you think they carried back some worry about their well-being? That the same fate might await them?

Are you starting to see what this has to do with you? These disciples had been busy working for Jesus. But do you realize that's what you're busy doing every day? We might not always remember it, but it's a truth we call "Christian vocation," and it gives purpose to all we do. In whatever station God has placed you in life, you serve God by serving others in it. God has so ordered this world that he provides for its needs through us. If you're a parent, you're God's hands to keep your children fed and clothed. If you're a friend, you're God's mouth to speak a word of encouragement when the other is depressed. If you're a neighbor, you're God's eyes to watch their house while they're on vacation; a mechanic, God uses your tools to keep cars running. Since we all have multiple callings – parent, child, sibling, spouse, employee, friend, neighbor – your life is a blessed busyness of serving God in them.

But because we're sinful like those disciples were, it's a blessed busyness that comes with burdens. We get to the end of the day, and it's not just faithful work we have to report. It's failures, too. Opportunities missed, things left unsaid and undone. Times instead of using hands to help others, help myself; times we're used our words to hurt instead of heal. It's a busyness that because we are sinners also often breeds worry. About the loved ones God's placed in our lives. About our own needs being met. About finances, the future, all the things that need to be done, and the little time we have to do them.

Are you in the habit of doing what these disciples did? At the end of each busy day, reporting to Jesus **all that you've done**? Laying bare before him your failures and your worries? When we don't, those things weigh us down and wear us out spiritually.

But when we do, what do we find? We find a Jesus who doesn't scold us or send us away. We find a Jesus who loves to hear from us and gives us a precious invitation.

II. Jesus gives us rest

³¹**Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."** I'm sure Jesus had in mind a bite to eat and some much needed rest for their bodies. But don't you think he'd use this alone time to give them the even more needed rest for their souls, too? Assure them that their failures were forgiven. Give them promises to take away their fears.

It is, after all, what he does for you. In his Word, he shows you his work for you that gives you rest. How he tirelessly lived perfectly in all of his vocations in your place for all the times you haven't, and gives you the credit for it. How he alone shouldered the burden of your failures and carried them to the cross, where he was punished for every last one, taking them away forever. Putting you at peace with God, giving you rest in his forgiveness.

In his word, he shows you his work that gives you rest from your worries. That the Savior who died for you now lives for you, too. Like we sang in Psalm 23, as a perfect Shepherd caring for you, his sheep. He'll always provide for you, body and soul: "I shall not be in want." He'll protect you: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." His love for you will not fail: "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life." He'll take you to heaven when you die: "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Come with me, Jesus says to you, **by yourself to a quiet place and get some rest**. Turn off your smartphone and TV, close your laptop. Get away from the busyness of "do" for a while each day and let Jesus do for you, instead. Spend some alone time with Jesus in his Word. He has words just for you – words tailor made for the burdens you bear, words that give you just the rest that you need.

III. *Rest readies us for work*

But for Jesus and these disciples, things didn't quite go according to plan. ³²**So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.** ³³**But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.** They may have gotten some rest in the boat, but there was more work waiting for them when they got to shore.

And think about Jesus' reaction to this for a second. These people weren't invited on this trip. This was a rude intrusion into alone time with his disciples. And from what we know from what follows, many of them were looking for Jesus for all the wrong reasons. They just wanted to see another miracle.

But is Jesus bothered? Annoyed? Frustrated and angry? No. **When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.** He's filled with compassion for them. They were lost sheep whose spiritual leaders misled them and malnourished them with laws, not message of God's love. So Jesus tends to them: **So he began teaching them many things.**

What if it had been you? I put myself in Jesus' shoes, and seeing the crowds again, a part of my heart sinks: "More of this." But I don't think I'm alone, and I don't think we have to imagine too hard. Because this kind of thing happens to us. We're looking forward to some personal time, when a child causes another problem for us to deal with. We're busy working, and suddenly someone drops another need on our already full plate. And our reaction isn't always compassion, is it? Bothered, annoyed, frustrated.

Maybe it's a sign that we're not getting enough rest time with Jesus. Because it's that rest in God's Word that readies us for more work. As he assures us we're forgiven, he refreshes us to serve. It's as Jesus fills up our hearts with his love for us that he gives us more compassion for others. It's as Jesus shows us how he died to meet our greatest needs that he moves us to joyfully meet the needs of others. It's in rest time with Jesus that he gives us hearts more like his, that will see people with their needs not as annoyances but opportunities to, in a small way, love as we are loved, and care as we are cared for.

Work. Rest. Repeat. One day, the cycle will end – when your Savior welcomes you into the perfect rest of heaven. Until then, as you're busy with the work God gives you, keep finding the rest your soul needs in Jesus' word. Amen.