

Year B, Proper 11

July 22, 2018

✠In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

One of the things I love about our summer mission trip to Hurley, Virginia is that we eat together. Breakfast, we're at the mercy of the group of young people assigned that day to plan, prepare and serve breakfast (and they actually do a decent job) but we all sit together at long tables, eating confetti pancakes or other gourmet delights our youth invent, and we talk about the day ahead, or, for the adults, how poorly we slept the night before. For lunch, each small work team breaks when they want, finds a nice place in the shade, if possible – and preferably where there are no snakes or hornets – and shares some important downtime. Dinners at Hurley are prepared by community volunteers. We gather around 6:00 for a quick prayer before dinner, and then we feast together on more starchy food than you've ever seen in one place in your life. Dinner can be raucous as our youth and adults swap horror stories of who had the worst job that day, or who spilled the bucket of paint on whose head or telling of successes for the day – of good, hard work done. Mealtimes are joyful, glorious chaos and togetherness...and it's community.

Our Gospel lesson this morning paints a picture of chaos that looks pretty familiar to many of us. The author of Mark's Gospel writes, "...many were coming and going, and [Jesus and the disciples] had no leisure even to eat."<sup>1</sup> We're probably all guilty of grabbing a meal on the go – the hectic pace we keep has become just another fact of life, and that's just one symptom of the fact that we so rarely have time for ourselves, and by extension, time for our families, time for our community, time for our church...and time for God.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 6:31

Interestingly, this hectic lifestyle seemed to be an ancient problem, as well, as Mark's Gospel tells us that Jesus and the disciples are pursued even out to the middle of nowhere, by people desperate for the healing touch of Jesus. Jesus encourages his disciples to find a quiet place for rest, and yet, while Jesus seeks out much needed peace and quiet, he still responds to the needs of hurting people. And at the conclusion of our Gospel lesson this morning, we find Jesus mobbed by crowds everywhere he went.

This is kind of an odd Gospel lesson, so what are we supposed to make of it? This morning I've talked about two opposing ideas: the need for community and togetherness...and the need for solitude and quiet. As an extreme introvert, I really do value solitude and quiet. I find crowds exhausting and I absolutely hate being the center of attention. I need time away to recharge and reenergize, and in that time away, I can listen for the whispers of the Holy Spirit.

God recognized our need for solitude, and rest, in his commandment to "remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy."<sup>2</sup> That commandment is not meant to be a terrible inconvenience for us – "oh no, it's Sunday and the mall is closed!" – but a reminder – an insistence – that we cannot maintain a hectic lifestyle forever.

The Sabbath commandment was good news for both the Hebrew people, and for the slaves and servants of the Hebrew people – for all were commanded to observe a weekly sabbath from their labors. One commentator notes that, more of us find ourselves in a place not all that different from the Egypt where the ancient Hebrews languished [in slavery]. Except our slavery is self-constructed, self-imposed, and therefore far more difficult to detect or overcome. We are enslaved to notions of success, and therefore put few limits on work. We are enslaved to ideas about our children having every opportunity possible, and therefore schedule them into frenetic

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<sup>2</sup> Exodus 20:8

lives and wonder why they have a hard time focusing. We are enslaved to the belief that the only thing that will bring contentment is *more* -- more money, more space in our homes, more cars, more things to put on our resumes or in our closets...<sup>3</sup> We need rest...and so do we rarely find it. Rest and solitude (*real rest and solitude*) give us an opportunity – a gift – to examine our lives, to check our priorities, to see if our way of life aligns with a Christ-like life, an opportunity to listen to the whispers of the Holy Spirit.

As much as I need solitude, I crave community as well, for in community and fellowship we find the Body of Christ, and all the goodness and love that emanate from Jesus. In the Body of Christ, we find spiritual food that supports and sustains us. It is in community that we, the people of St. Alban's, bring Christ's message of healing and redemption and hope to our community and beyond. And if we are not doing that – if we are not sharing the hope of Christ – then we aren't doing our job.

Solitude and community are both vital parts of our lives, for in both solitude *and* in community we find Christ, who sustains and nurtures us, enabling us to continue doing the good work we have been given to do – to love and serve God as faithful witness of Christ our Lord.

AMEN

Ad maiorem Dei gloriam

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1494>