

September 20, 2020

*"Come Away With Me"*

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Genesis 1:31-2:3; Isaiah 30:15 Mark 6:30-32; Matthew 11:28-30

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A couple of weeks ago I had the good fortune of being in Wellfleet for a family get-together with the kids and grandkids. As many of you know, that area of the Cape along the Atlantic Ocean rises high on a cliff way above the water. It was a beautiful, clear blue day, and you could actually see the curvature of the earth looking out over the ocean at the horizon. Well, we all went down to the beach, where our senses were overwhelmed with all the natural wonder surrounding us. There was the warm sun, fresh sea air, the high cliffs, the endless miles of white sand, the crashing of the waves, and the sound of children laughing and playing. And I also happened to notice there was no phone reception. That made things even better. So here we were, ten of us, all reveling and feeling such joy in God's magnificent creation. And I had such a humble feeling of awe, knowing that I was connected to and part of something so much greater than myself. Remember a time when you felt that way?

Standing there, it hit me again why St. Paul said, "Ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God." Yes, creation has a way of tutoring us in our faith if we only take the time to stop. If we only take the time to stop and look and listen. But that apparently is hard to do for many in today's culture. Even in this 'new normal,' where we supposedly have more time to take a step back and reflect on our lives and our meaning and purpose, we still seem so preoccupied with the many of the things of this world that cause us angst and result in so many of our distractions. Social media and 24/7 news are the worst culprits. And now that Justice Ginsberg had died, I'm afraid it may get worse. But there's also emails, texts, movies and television of all kinds. And some of these can be informative and entertaining to a degree, but when they take up so much of our time and focus, they can take a toll on our emotional and spiritual well-being. Why? Because the consequence of being so distracted is that our relationship with the Almighty can easily be neglected or even become an after-thought. That's a real concern. Because a far-off God unconsciously creates in us feelings of helplessness, powerlessness and maybe even feelings of resentment. After all, why did God allow this virus to happen? Blinded by this kind of thinking, we distance ourselves from the divine help and love and blessings that comes to us in a thousand different ways. Yes, God's eye is certainly on the sparrow, but ours has become so distracted, we don't notice that beautiful little humming bird still coming to our backyard, wanting to be fed.

But let me get back to the beach. The kids, of course, were the center of attention. Running down into the water as the waves receded, and then back up to shore as the waves come roaring in. Playing and digging in the sand, making castles and moats. Looking for seals and sharks, the former of which we saw many, the latter, thankfully, none! And then flying an old fashion kite. Everyone had a turn at it. From 1½ year old Ryan, to... well, old Opa John. It was a fun day! But as all of us know, a day at the beach can be exhausting. And we adults like to push on, however, what do kids do in the middle of the party? They stop and rest. Their little bodies know when they've had enough, so they say, "I'm ready to go in." Now the point is, they are as good at resting and renewing themselves as they are at their playing. And maybe that's a lesson we need to learn as well. You know, today as we thought about and lifted up our kids and blessed their backpacks, here's another wonderful thing about children – look at how good they are at expressing their love. Sometimes that love is up close and personal – the kind of love shown when they come over to be held quietly in your arms, or in the contented look they give you when you tuck them in bed and kiss them goodnight. Other times their love is shown in more subtle ways. When they just want to be in the same room with you – to make sure Mommy or Mimi is there. Or when they want to just be with Dad or Opa kicking a soccer ball around, sharing time together. Yes, that's what kids do, they play hard, they know how to love and be loved, and they know the joy of rest and renewal. Maybe that's why, if I recall correctly, Jesus emphasized the fact that we must become "like children" in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. Because, really, when you think about it, how good are we adults at doing what our children do so well? At playing, at living, at resting, and at expressing love to each other and especially to our heavenly parent, Almighty God?

So let's look specifically at 'rest,' for that is exactly the point of all of today's scriptures. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus told his disciples, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." Now, lest we think we know what busy is, look at Jesus and the disciples. Earlier in this chapter, Jesus sent the disciples out to the surrounding villages to preach about God, to teach the things he taught, to heal the sick and comfort the hurting. And now crowds are following them, looking for more, and Mark tells us they were so busy, they didn't even have time to eat. But consider this – even though there was so much more to do, Jesus orders them to stop, get away and rest. Why? Because you see, and listen close, for this is important, rest in this sense is really a spiritual discipline. For God actually ordained rest. Listen again to what happened at the beginning of creation. "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested. Then God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day he rested from all the work he had done in creation." God, himself, set aside a time of rest and celebration as he relished in his creation that was "very good." And

this was so important to God, and he put such a high value on this kind of rest, that he ordained it for you and me, as well. It's the fourth commandment: "Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord, you shall not do any work." The word Sabbath, literally means "stop, cease." It means hitting the pause button on our lives. You see, God knew that for our well-being, we need to stop and rest and reflect and renew ourselves not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually as well.

It's funny, we're all concerned about our health these days, aren't we? But by that we typically mean our physical health. Most of us try to eat right, and get exercise. We're aware of every new ache or pain. And we try to fix whatever is wrong with our bodies. But remember, Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone." You see, we are not just physical beings. We're made up of body and soul. And the health of our soul is of equal, if not more importance, than our bodies. You see, the health of our body will determine the number of years we live, but the health of our soul will determine how we live: the quality of our life, and ultimately our eternal destiny. A story is told of a group of explorers in Africa which employed some natives to go with them into the interior. Being in a hurry to reach their objective, the explorers pushed relentlessly for days. One day, however, the natives just sat down and would go no further. Asked what was wrong, the natives replied, "We are waiting for our souls to catch up with our bodies." Yes, the state of our inner being is of critical importance. It's only when our spiritual lives are in order that we have the proper balance, the proper perspective in our lives. It is only when our souls are healthy that we find those spiritual gifts of hope and joy so necessary in our lives are ours through the One who loves us unconditionally. That's why Jesus said, "Come away with me and find rest." The kind of rest that relaxes us, refreshes us and refocuses us. When we take the time to rest in Christ, we find divine wisdom and strength, we find our burdens are lightened, we find that the world and the people around us look different – we have more patience, problems don't loom quite so large, our priorities are set right.

Oswald Chambers says, "The questions that matter most in this life are remarkably few. And they are all answered by these words, 'Come to me, and I will give you rest.' Not, do this, or don't do that, but come to me and I will give you rest." This week, stop, look and listen, maybe at the beach, or taking a walk, or in your yard, or in fact, anywhere, listen for the whisper of the Lord, telling you, "Come to me. Come away with me." And then, trust me, you will find rest for your soul. Amen.

Prayer:

O Lord, sometimes it is so difficult for us to stop and look at our lives, and listen for your voice. We feel we have to be busy, be active, be doing something. And in the process we find ourselves stressed, impatient, anxious. But we need to remember that even you, O God needed to rest. Even Jesus needed to rest. And by commanding us to take a Sabbath rest, you are actually giving us a gift. You are giving us permission to hit the pause button on our busyness, and stop to refresh, refocus and renew. Just like the rhythm of nature has time of bloom and blossom and times of dormancy, seasons of activity and season of quiet, so we too are made to have an ebb and flow of productivity and rest, of doing and of just being. So may we make the time to “come away with you, and find rest for our souls.” This we ask in the name of the one who gives us that invitation, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.