

**Sermon for 7-22-18**  
**Mark 6:30-34, 53-56**  
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**Christ Episcopal Church, Springfield OH**

A few short weeks ago, while serving as a chaplain at our diocesan summer camp, I asked a rowdy group of 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders if any of them could name the four evangelists. Not surprisingly, the room was silent for a few seconds, until one hand shot up -- my son Jesse's.

Now I know the Bible says pride is a sin, but in that moment I couldn't hide my self-satisfied smile. Yes, of course *my* son knows the answer, because I've taught him *so well*. It would have been unseemly to call on him if there were any other hands raised, but since his was the only one, it was okay.

"Jesse, who are the four evangelists?"

He stood up, and confidently recited the four names: "John, Paul, George, and Ringo."

In Jesse's defense, two of those **are** very important biblical names... and I realized later that the term "evangelist" was the tricky part of the question. If I'd asked him to name the four Gospel writers, he would have known, obviously.

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I remembered this moment as I reflected on our Gospel passage for today. The description of the frenzied crowds following Jesus and his disciples brings to mind images from 1964 and '65, during the height of Beatlemania. "... Many [people] were coming and going, and [the disciples] had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves... Many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them."

Imagine what it might feel like, to be surrounded by hordes of people wherever you go. Imagine the intense pressure of losing your anonymity, the excitement and adrenaline rush that quickly turns to exhaustion, and then perhaps grief -- grief over the loss of your previous life, your ability to live and move freely without being pursued.

It's right here, during the 6th chapter of the Gospel according to Mark, at this point in their ministry, that the disciples begin to realize a hard truth -- that their lives are no longer their own. They've already given up their homes and livelihoods to travel with Jesus and serve him as best they can, but in this moment, they realize that they belong to the people as well. Their job is to serve alongside the Good Shepherd, as his apprentices, and this service can only happen in the midst of the sheep. For all intents and purposes, the disciples belong to the people now.

This may be challenging for us to wrap our heads around, but I'm willing to bet that my son's four evangelists -- John, Paul, George, and Ringo -- would understand. They would understand the intense pressure, the loss of freedom, and the very human need for escape to quiet and solitude. Some of you probably saw Paul McCartney's recent appearance on "The Late Late Show with James Corden" -- if you haven't seen it, look it up on YouTube -- in it, Paul tells a charming anecdote from the early days of Beatlemania about how annoyed he would get at his father for inviting fans into their home for tea and 'blowing his cover' by calling out "Goodbye Paul!" when he attempted to go out in disguise.

It wasn't that Paul disliked his fans or didn't appreciate them; but he needed a break sometimes. The pressures of fame were overwhelming, and he craved solitude and anonymity, not unlike the disciples in today's story.

Now, please don't misunderstand me -- I'm not trying to say that Paul McCartney is as great as our Lord's disciples... although he is one of the best (if not the best) songwriters of all time and his music inspires goodness and love and "Let it Be" is so pure and beautiful that it makes me cry every time I

hear it... but he is an example of a person whose life and work have become collective property.

It seems that many (or most) people who attain this level of notoriety and cultural symbolism 'fall apart' in one way or another or 'crack' under the pressure. That's not a statement of judgement, simply an observation. And although he is not perfect, Paul McCartney has been able to live with this intense pressure for decades and decades, through life's dramatic ups and downs, without falling apart or burning out. Why is that? We can only assume that he has been able to negotiate enough space for quiet and solitude while also remaining present and connected to his vocation as a musical artist.

This is a lesson we all have to learn, if we want to stay true to ourselves, if we seek to fulfill our individual vocations, the holy work to which we are called (and we are all called to holy work, make no doubt about it, although yours and mine may not look the same). Theologian Frederick Buechner famously wrote: "The place God calls you to, [your vocation], is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."<sup>i</sup>

We are all called to holy work, and if we want to remain faithful, to keep it up for any length of time, we must do this ongoing dance of negotiation. We must work, and then rest, and then get back to work; we must do justice and love kindness and walk humbly with our God, and when we feel fatigue creeping in, we must slow down, and step back, and find rest for our souls, so that we can return to our work refreshed and renewed.

That's why Jesus tells his friends to "come away to a deserted place... and rest a while." Our Lord is both human and divine, but his disciples are only human -- just like us! -- and he knows that they need rest. They need it deeply in their bodies and minds and souls, and if they do not get it, their holy work will go undone because they will crash and burn, they will fall apart, and they will be of no more use to Jesus or themselves. Taking that break, finding that refreshment, does not make them weak or ineffective or

unfaithful; rather, it is that refreshment that allows them to pick up and continue their faithful service, their holy vocation.

My friends, I wonder, how often do you rest a while in a deserted place? How often do you step away from your overscheduled daily grind seeking quiet, and stillness, and peace? How often do you carve out sabbath space, where you can pray and meditate and simply **be**? If you're anything like me, then the answer is not enough.

We have lots of newfangled coping mechanisms for exhaustion today that the disciples didn't have, and we use them to fuel our pursuit of this ridiculous idea that we can be always productive, always working, always "on." Red Bull and coffee keep us wired, while our smartphones and "the cloud" ensure constant access and availability. We've discovered that we can do work, lots of work, without taking time to observe sabbath, without resting in deserted places... but we cannot do our holy work this way. We cannot live out our vocations like drugged-up hamsters on tiny wheels. That's not how God designed us. That's not what God intends or desires for us.

We humans are made for ministry, for mission, for good works, for enacting the reign of God; and for times of quiet rest and soul refreshment. We need time to rest in those deserted places where we can tune our ears and hearts and minds to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our midst. That holy rest recharges our souls, and enables us to continue in our vocations, our holy work. Our work may not be the same, but we all share that ongoing need for spiritual restoration. We all need time in deserted places, where we can rest a while, and watch for the Spirit.

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Just a few days ago, I came across an old interview where Paul McCartney described how he was inspired to write "Let It Be."

*"I was going through a really difficult time around the autumn of 1968... I think I was sensing the Beatles were breaking up, so I was*

*staying up late at night, drinking, doing drugs, living and playing hard... I was exhausted. Then one night, somewhere between deep sleep and insomnia, I had the most comforting dream about my mother, who died when I was only 14. One of the difficulties I had, as the years went by, was that I couldn't recall her face so easily... So in this dream twelve years later, my mother appeared, and there was her face, completely clear... It was really like she had visited me at this very difficult point in my life and gave me this message: Be gentle, don't fight things, ...let it be... it will all work out... I felt very blessed."<sup>iii</sup>*

Now, Paul may not have called this a Holy Spirit moment, but it sure sounds like the Spirit to me. It sounds like the Holy Spirit swooping in at just the right time, when a man is depleted and drained, and restoring his soul with exactly what he needed. It sounds like renewal and refreshment and maybe even resurrection.

This is what the Spirit offers us, this is how God restores us, this is why Jesus calls us to rest a while in places of stillness and peace. May we never be too busy to come away to a deserted place and find restoration; may we never forget to take time to quiet our souls and just **let it be**. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2017/7/18/vocation>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/the-beatles/9896636/Paul-McCartney-I-wish-I-could-spend-more-time-with-my-mother.html>