

**July 18, 2021 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost** **Jeremiah 23:1-6, Psalm 23**  
**Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope Ephesians 2:14-22, Mark 6:30-34, 53-56**

[<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/06/news-concerns-sleep>  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/19/well/mind/covid-mental-health-languishing.html>;  
Debie Thomas in Journey with Jesus posted on July 11, 2021, called The Gift of Rest:  
<https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay>, Thomas references both of the earlier studies but definitely worth reading them solo, too. Henri Nouwen, Out of Solitude, introduction.]

**Grace and peace, *rest and renewal*, to you, beloved of Christ Jesus. Amen.**

**I'm curious about the stories I've been hearing this spring and summer.**

**Some of these stories are told, at least in part, in the form of statistics:**

For instance, noting a surge in sleep disorders related to the pandemic,

researches wrote: "2 in 3 Americans are reporting they are sleeping more or less than desired."

How is your sleeping?

**Some of these stories are told in description:**

In the New York Times in April, organizational psychologist Adam Grant described what "may well be the dominant emotion of 2021" as "languishing."

On the spectrum between depression and flourishing, Languishing, he wrote,

is that "sense of stagnation and emptiness,"

"muddling through your days, looking at your life through a foggy windshield,"

Or we might just say: feeling blah.

Adam Grant's article and others are intriguing,

for I appreciate words to describe what I hear from others and sometimes feel in myself.

**Some of the stories come as anecdotes:**

This summer feels so much busier, one person quipped.

Another spoke (with joy and a bit of fatigue, overwhelm) about how nearly every evening is scheduled, seeing much of friends and family.

And a scholar wrote: "We've lost a sense of balance and rhythm.

We can't get started.

We can't wind down.

We're anxious, sleepless, overstimulated, and bored." (Debie Thomas)

**Our Gospel today from Mark is well placed.**

**It's a dose of grace it seems we need more than we may even know.**

Let's look at the passage.

**We're now deeply into Mark.**

The disciples have been given power to cast out demons, to cure and heal.

John the Baptist has been imprisoned and killed—remember last week's grisly, gory reading?

And the disciples have been sent out on their first mission.

Now they are back, gathering around Jesus.

“Telling Jesus all that they had done and taught.”

Can you feel the adrenaline in this reading?

They are set, eager, excited.

Like Harry Potter and Ron and Hermione getting a taste of their first successful spells in charms class.

Or that lightbulb when a student of any age “gets it”, claims it, connects.

Or my yelp of Yes! when the Do-It-Yourself-Fix I've found on YouTube allows me to cross off a project on my list! .

**The disciples are back, psyched, clambering to debrief with their teacher, ready to do it all again.**

And Jesus... doesn't say, *Okay, great, go for it, second mission, go.*

Nor does Jesus say, *Sit down and tell me all about it.*

Instead Jesus redirects them, “Come away to a deserted place by yourselves and rest a while.”

In their fast and hyped up flow, Jesus steers them into the quite eddy, to breathe, to rest.

**Did you notice that today's reading is a patchwork of verses?**

There's a span from verse 30 to 34, and *then* another from verse 53 to 56.

What happens in the middle, in those sections that we didn't read?

Oh, just a few things... a miracle or two:

Like Mark's version of Jesus feeding the 5000,

and then Jesus walking on water and stilling the storm.

Nothing much, right?!

**That's often how we hear about Jesus,** and his disciples:

in a swirl of feeding and healing,

striding from town to town,

preaching, reaching, moving quickly.

Especially in Mark's telling, Mark is famous for the word we read as *immediately*.

**After that "little" interlude we skipped, the passage continues** at full speed with crowds gathering, "like sheep without a shepherd."

Finally, today's gospel concludes with people rushing about the whole region to bring to Jesus those in need, reaching out even to touch the fringe of Jesus' cloak.

**In the midst of so much action, frenetic, really, there are these quiet moments.**

"Come away," Jesus calls, "to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile."

**Beloved ones, we have a God who values rest.**

Let me say that once more,

lest it's too basic,

lest we get sucked into believing that Jesus is in constant motion.

We have a God who values rest.

Like a parent quietly coaching a dysregulated child back toward emotional regulation,

we have a God who knows rhythm and health,

a Savior who pushes pause,

who slows down the pace, not to make them less effective, but probably more effective.

Come away and rest, slow down and pray, let grace keep you, fill you, lead you.

**Ann XXX from our congregation fell while skiing this winter, and she fell bad.**

She told us her healing story during Lent this year, and,

now, seven months after the fall, Ann's healing continues.

She told me the other day about her daughter, Ingrid, a physical therapist,

who reminds Ann that building muscle is 20% work and 80% rest. Yes, you heard me: 80% rest.

As Ann says it, knowing the struggle to slow down, recognizing her own cultural tendencies,

Resting "is not a Scandinavian way to live! This is so hard!"

And yet: God is active in the resting, in the quiet, silently weaving our bodies and our souls back to health.

**Henri Nouwen in his book Out of Solitude writes about this.**

referencing an earlier verse in Mark,

a verse where Jesus rises long before dawn and goes to a lonely place to pray.

In the middle of action, there is this quiet moment of prayer.

Nouwen says, "...the secret of Jesus's ministry is hidden in that lonely place where he went to pray, early in the morning, long before dawn." The secret of his ministry...

In today's passage, Jesus isn't just praying on his own,  
he's teaching his disciples a pattern of prayer, of rest.

**Those statistics I mentioned**, the stories, that blah, languishing, emotion of the year,  
our struggle with sleep,  
the busyness and perhaps some boredom,  
they are real in this time.

If you're feeling out of balance, you are not alone.

**This morning we're doing some celebrating.**

We're celebrating being together—whether in person or virtually, we're together in Christ, surviving.

We're celebrating generosity, even in hard times, you have been so very faithful in giving.

We're celebrating community and what better way than to fire up the pizza oven, the first time since late January 2020.

And we're celebrating that the solar project is getting off the ground, literally.

We're putting panels on our rooftop and in the parking lot,  
enough panels to produce 91 kilowatts of energy,  
enough energy to run this building, this hub for ministry.

This process, it hasn't been easy, it's actually been very challenging.

But the likes of Tim Abrahamson and Stewart Herman have led us well.

Today we'll proverbially break ground, really we'll pray and bless,

not just the array, but what it means  
to make a stand for climate justice,  
to be a witness in our neighborhood,  
to trust much, and act boldly.

**I'm also mindful that today is the first time** we've gathered since the announcement that Zach, our Minister of Worship and Music, is leaving in August to move to Madison, Wisconsin.

On August 8 we'll give thanks for Zach's big, big impact on our community's worship life.

Sheesh, Zach, we'll miss you.

I know this announcement stirs all kinds of emotion, and plenty anxiety.

That's real, I know it, but I'm also feeling a sense of calm.  
We're going to be okay. The Spirit guides us.  
We can take the next steps, not going backward, but rather forward.

**Sometimes it's when I slow down that the grief of this year hits me:**

yes, the goodbyes to good folks we love like Zach and Nick,  
but also the grief of everything, those we've lost, time we've lost, moments we've lost.  
For many, especially our kids and young people, it hasn't brought out the best.  
Slowing down makes a space for grief, for emotion.  
Slowing down also makes a space for gratitude, for living deeply, right where we are.

**Come away, Jesus says, come away.**

Slowing down, resting, pausing,  
even in the midst of pizza and solar arrays and returning to life together,  
even as we work for justice and stay connected,  
even as we plan for staffing transitions,  
resting is good.

It is very good, it is holy, it is vital.  
Come away, Jesus says, come away.  
For resting reminds us that God is God.  
That this shepherd knows their flock.  
This shepherd, our shepherd, will care for us in the greenest pastures and in the deepest valleys.  
Our shepherd will meet our need, will set the table,  
will bring us into the house of mercy.

**Take a moment now, dear ones, and breathe....**

Rest in God.

Come away to a deserted place and rest a while, Jesus called.  
Come away, beloved, come away and rest. Amen.