

First Reading – 2 Samuel 7:1-14a

¹Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²the king said to the prophet Nathan, “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.” ³Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you.”

⁴But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: ⁵Go and tell my servant David: Thus, says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. ⁷Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders^[a] of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?” ⁸Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; ⁹and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ¹²When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your

offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.

Second Reading – Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Our New Testament passage is a bit different today. We will be reading only parts of two stories that are most likely familiar to you... the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus' walking on water. The interesting part of this lectionary reading is that we don't focus on either of the miraculous events; rather we focus on what else is happening. The apostles had just returned from being sent out by Jesus in pairs. They came back to tell what they had accomplished in the name of Jesus. Let's listen to this lectionary text, as if we were apostle's fresh from the mission field:

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³² And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴ As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴ When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, ⁵⁵ and rushed about that

whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was.⁵⁶ And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

The Message - Take a Break

For teachers and students among us summer is coming to a quick close. Teachers in the Redlands Unified School District return to the classroom on Monday, August 6th, while students return on Wednesday, August 8th. The slower pace of summer will quicken and the memories of wonderful vacations will fade fast as assignments are handed out and all school related activities ramp up. Although, I have scheduled a two-week vacation in Kauai in August, I know that when the calendar flips to Fall the pace of life seems to accelerate for me, and before I know it, it will be December! Teachers and pastors are always planning in advance; and that advanced planning in and of itself, seems to make my heart rate quicken as days seem to speed by faster and faster. I can feel my heart start to race, even just saying these words!

“Alarm clock screaming, bare feet hit the floor. It’s off to the races everybody out the door. Ninety miles an hour, going fast as I can. Trying to push a little harder, trying to get the upper hand. So much to do in so little time... I’m busy, busy, busy... I’m hanging on tight...”

Jonny Diaz captures the frantic pace of life that many of us experience in his song entitled *Breathe*. The song’s pace is

frantic at the beginning, but then the refrain stops listeners in their tracks with its tempo change:

“Breathe, just breathe. Come and rest at my feet, and be, just be.

Chaos calls - but all you really need - is to just breathe.”

In the words of this refrain, I hear Jesus saying to the disciples, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile.”

“Breathe, just breathe,” says Jesus. Take a break and rest awhile [in] “the peace of God that overcomes,” sings Diaz. “Just breathe, just breathe,” Diaz continues, “let your weary spirit rest, lay down what’s good and find what’s best. Just breathe, just breathe.”

The disciples had just done some amazing good. Jesus had sent them out two by two and they had just returned to share their stories. There was excitement in the air as they shared of shaking the dust from their feet and stories of their Spirit-empowered teaching and miraculous healings. The good they had done was amazing, yet Jesus didn’t tell them to get out there, do some more, and do it right now.

No Jesus said, “Take a break.” Come away and rest awhile. These are words of wisdom for our oft frenetic lives, especially when our lives are producing good works for the kingdom of God; for doing good isn’t able to become our best without rest.

In our passage from 2nd Samuel, we heard that the Lord invited King David to rest by giving him a break from his enemies. I’m sure the Lord hoped King David would take a break and refuel his spirit. That he would take a break and lay down what had been good, so that he would discern what’s best to next. Yet,

David just charged ahead. Sometimes we neglect to take a break and rest in the peace of God, when we do as David did and forget to inquire of God.

David certainly did, for he said to his trusted servant, "Here I am, comfortable in a luxurious house of cedar, while the Ark of God sits in a plain tent." I'm in permanent housing while God's in temporary housing. "I know what I'll do," David said. Nathan immediately responded, without taking a break saying, "Whatever you have in mind go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you." The Lord had been with David, so the assumption was that whatever David decided to do would be blessed by the Lord, as neither of these faithful men stopped to rest in the Lord, to inquire whether the "good" David was planning was aligned with God's "best" for David.

When we are busy doing what we believe is good, we sometimes fail to ask God whether what we are doing is really the best. We are reluctant to delay what is good in order to determine, with God's help, the best. It reminds me of an oft told parable:

One summer in the village, the people gathered for a picnic. As they shared food and conversation, someone noticed a baby in the river, struggling and crying. The baby was going to drown!

Someone rushed to save the baby. Then, they noticed another screaming baby in the river, and they pulled that baby out. Soon, more babies were seen drowning in the river, and the townspeople were pulling them out as fast as they could. It took great effort, and they began to organize their activities in order to save the babies as they came down the river. As everyone else was busy in the rescue efforts to save the babies, two of the

townspeople took a break from the intense work of doing good to walk upstream.

“Where are you going?” shouted one of the rescuers. “We need you here to help us save these babies!”

“We are going upstream to stop whoever is throwing them in!”

The townspeople were doing immense good, yet until two villagers took a break the best could not be discovered.

Taking a break though, in our culture of productivity is not always easy. Like the two who took a break in our parable, we hear the do-gooders shout at us, “We need you here to help us now.” There are sick to visit, hungry to be fed, homeless to be housed, justice to be done, children to be taught, worship needs to be planned, music needs to be prepared, committees need to be led, the building needs to be fixed... you get the picture there is always plenty of good that needs to be done. Yet, do we heed Jesus’ words, “Come away to a deserted place and rest a while,” so that our efforts are not just good, but the best?

“Take a break.” I wonder what word we need to hear from God about the good that we are doing as a church, about the good we are doing individually. Do we need to walk upstream or take a look from 30,000 feet? Do we need to heed God’s still small voice, as Nathan did for David?

I know that taking a break is imperative to the health of my ministry among you, whether it is a short walk around campus, a morning in my backyard enjoying the sounds of my pond and the life that it draws, a Sunday afternoon of softball with family and friends, a week of contemplative silence, or a vacation with family. We all need to take a break from our doing, so that

perspective can be gained and the best can be discerned by God's grace.

The disciples heeded Jesus' invitation, yet it wasn't long lived. When they went ashore, Jesus saw a great crowd and "Jesus had compassion for them." Jesus heart broke open for they were like sheep without a shepherd and so he got back to work - teaching and healing, healing and teaching. This passage speaks to the tension of ministry and faith. The needs around us are great, often times even overwhelming. And like Jesus our hearts will broke open, leading us to respond with action. Yet, action alone without rest, like the parable taught, does not always lead to what is best. This leads me to another parable this morning:

One man challenged another to an all-day wood chopping contest. The challenger worked very hard, stopping only for a brief lunch break. The other man had a leisurely lunch and took several breaks during the day. At the end of the day, the challenger was surprised and annoyed to find that the other fellow had chopped substantially more wood than he had. "I don't get it," he said. "Every time I checked, you were taking a rest, yet you chopped more wood than I did." "Ah, but you didn't notice," said the winning woodsman, "that I was sharpening my ax when I sat down to rest."

Jesus' invitation to the disciples, "Come away and rest a while," is our invitation to sharpen our axe so to speak. To sharpen our understanding of the will and ways of God, so that we may not only understand what is good, but what is best for us as individuals and as a church. I have heard it said that action

and rest are like two wings of the same airplane. Both are needed to fly, for one without the other leads to disaster!

As I reflect on our ministry together... I wonder if we have sharpened our axe? Do we follow Jesus' advice to take a break and come away with him? Do we listen for the stirring of God as we rest, leading us to act? Or are we just overwhelmed by the need or the task at hand, so that we just keep working like crazy like the one woodsman did with only mediocre results?

To live out the gospel as Jesus did, I believe we need to develop a life giving rhythm between "take a break" and "break our hearts." We can't sit too long in the beach chair [as I did during the young disciple time], but we do need to sit a spell and listen to the stirrings of God, so that our actions bare the best results for the God's reign.

Take a break, so that you can be fueled for action! Amen.