

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B  
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St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI  
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I knew earlier this week that I was going to preach on this one funny sentence in the Gospel passage from Mark we heard this morning. Jesus says to his disciples, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile.” It struck me as a good word for a weary world, and I just knew I wanted to center my sermon around Jesus’ teaching about rest. What I didn’t know is that, while in South Bend Indiana getting ready to officiate at the wedding of Adam Brendle and Lauren Clark — which was yesterday and wonderful by the way — I would have a really terrible night of sleep at the downtown Double Tree. And so I found myself writing this sermon about rest in a hotel where I couldn’t sleep a wink. God Almighty certainly does have a sense of humor.

On to the topic at hand. I want you to imagine a college dorm room at about 6:50 am on a dark, wintry Minnesota morning. One roommate, me, is asleep in a bunk bed. The other roommate has gotten up very quietly, out of respect for me, gone to shower. Came back, dressed in the dark, and put together a book bag for his 8 am class, which meets Mondays through Thursdays. Then imagine that, still in the dark, the courteous roommate makes himself a little quick breakfast — just off-brand cereal and some cold milk from our dorm fridge. Then, while I lay sleeping, my roommate begins to eat his cereal. You have never heard cereal eaten in a more barbarous way. My roommate, the sadist, would slurp and then crunch and then slurp and then crunch, all while somehow getting the spoon to click on his teeth with every bite. Each morning of the semester, I awoke at 7:05 am to spend the next ten minutes listening to horrible sounds that you’d expect to hear from Jabba the Hutt, not a roommate who, in every other way, was pleasant. If you ever want a good feeling for what disturbed rest feels like, get someone to chew on a spoon close to your ear while you’re trying to sleep.

This morning, Jesus is worried that the pace of the disciples’ ministry is too fast. He makes them come away to a deserted place to be by themselves in solitude and to rest. This is such a beautiful image. I think we can all relate to those moments when life goes so quickly and full of stress that we think we will go a little nuts if we don’t rest. Ask any new parent. Ask anyone who has cared for someone terminally ill. Ask anyone who works two jobs to make ends meet. Ask anyone who sits in the barrage of information that comes nonstop from our little fascist telephones.

St. Augustine, one of the architects of this religion that we call Christianity, famously said the following: “You have made us for yourself, Almighty God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” Seventeen hundred years ago, this church patriarch suggested that the pace of life is such that no rest is possible until we find rest in God. Imagine that — a world with no electricity or 24-hour cable news, and Augustine thought THAT was too fast. How would he comprehend today?

I think the static of our busy world is a little like a metal spoon on teeth. It disrupts our peace. It interrupts our rest. And, as Jesus teaches and then later Augustine echoes, it requires that we go away and find solitude, that we find time with God.

It is not lost on me that I am the worst person to be sharing this message. Physician, heal thyself. Actually, I rather think that my general inability to rest in the grace of God in solitude proves Augustine's point. I think it is directly to those who have busy lives that Jesus is saying come away and rest awhile.

This is our wish for little Roman today as we baptize him into the family of Christ. We are inviting him into God's divine rest so that wherever the winds of this life buffet him, he will always have calm anchor in God's heart. Roman was made for God's delight. And Roman will return to God someday, may it be 200 years from now. And in these years that Roman walks the earth, he will need time to go away in the quiet to remember his baptism, to remember he was once marked as God's own. There will no doubt be great joys in Roman's life as well as difficulties and griefs. And God is the Lord of it all. And at no point is God's rest too far away to access. God has loved Roman since before time began, and today we simply put into ritual something is already true.

I do not believe you can live in our world as it is and not need the refreshment of rest in God. And it seems that the world will get even faster for Roman's generation. So this ancient lesson of solitude and of rest becomes even more important. Where is there a frenzy in your life that requires slowness? Where is there a clangor in your life that requires silence? Where is there exhaustion in your life that requires rest?

And before you think that you can't, remember that Jesus makes the disciples pause from their own holy work to find the time to stop. Holy, necessary, Godly stop. Sabbath. Retreat. Rest. This is what God is calling you to. This is what God is calling Roman to. This is the work of the church, just as much as feeding the hungry and serving the poor. Jesus says, come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile. Augustine says, you have made us for yourselves, Almighty God, and we will not find rest until we find it in you. Amen.