

“Rest”
Mark 6:30-34; 53-56
July 18, 2021
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The expression: “alone time” may or may not have originated with Oprah.

In any case, she helped make it popular. / As she describes it:

“Alone time is...

when I distance myself from the voices of the world

so I can hear my own.”

In a noisy chaotic world, people sometimes seek out some alone time.

Obviously this past year has changed how some of us think about that.

Maybe we have had enough alone time - - or decided it's not all it's cracked up to be.

But maybe others still miss it when it's not there - - or when it's LESS there.

Nancy and I have been watching a reality series on the History channel called: “Alone”.

It's about a group of contestants who try to survive in the wilderness.

They each have minimal tools and possessions.

So they have to hunt, fish, gather water and firewood, and build a shelter.

And there is the threat of bears and wolves. / And they are each - - all alone.

Each of the contestants are dropped in a different place far from one another.

The first few episodes of the first season are about getting used to things, gathering the basics for life and survival, food, fire, etc... / But for me the season gets interesting AFTER they have figured out how to survive physically, and a few contestants have dropped out because of fear of predators or other things.

That's when the remaining survivors start to deal mentally with being alone.

It's interesting how they respond.

One recites poetry from memory.

And until then you would have NO idea that this guy had any poetry memorized!

Another builds a guitar out of a stick and some fishing line.

Others just miss their families and talk to the camera about being lonely.

The real challenge of surviving alone - - seems to be as much mental as physical.

Maybe - - alone time - - has its limits.

I got to thinking about it because in Mark's gospel, the Bible says that Jesus urges his disciples to: "come away to a lonely place and rest".

Some translations call it a "quiet place", or "a deserted place".

The meaning of the Greek word is closest to "desert" or "deserted".

It is the kind of place you can be alone and escape crowds of people.

Escaping other people is why Jesus is said to have gone there.

To be alone.

The account of Jesus seeking a lonely place makes me wonder about his motive.

Clearly Jesus is seeking a retreat from crowds of people.

The reason seems to be that they all want something from him.

Jesus says to the disciples that part of the reason is to "rest".

Another motive to retreat to a quiet place - - is often prayer.

But if prayer is part of the motive, to what extent is prayer - - a lonely pursuit?

For the next few minutes I will explore the connection between - - prayer and solitude, because I think that one of the things we people of faith often do - - when we retreat is try to pray. / So to what extent is prayer - - the same as being alone - - or similar - - or different?

Of course, we do pray in groups too - - but that's a different thing.

Is prayer just - - a kind of alone time?

I'm not so sure.

According to Oprah - - the reason is to try to hear her own voice more clearly.

She seeks alone time to sort out her voices from the other voices.

It's s good thing to do.

But it's different from prayer.

The purpose of prayer - - is to hear God's voice - - not just our own.

In fact you could make the case that in prayer we are NOT alone, we are with God.

George Buttrick has described prayer as "friendship with God"

Mother Theresa describes prayer as "oneness with Christ".

And Brother Roger of Taize said that in prayer Christ makes a home in your soul.

Some of you may remember some of that from the class on prayer last fall.

So the purpose of prayer - - is not to be alone - - but to be with God.

Is that the same thing as resting - - while on retreat?

Not exactly.

Alone time helps us hear our own voice.

Prayer helps us hear God's voice.

Both are important.

In the Biblical text for this morning, Jesus and the disciples try to retreat and rest. / They are seeking some alone time - - and the crowds of people will not let them have it. / Maybe some times we just need rest.

But then - - once we have rested - - the question becomes - - will we then become lonely -
- and afraid - - or will we find a deeper connection - - and a relationship - - with God?

Rest and prayer are important parts of not only surviving - - but thriving.

I hope you can all continue to find ways to do both - - as you move ahead in life.

This Biblical account from Mark is a kind of frame for what we will read next week.

Next week the Gospel reading is the story of the feeding of the 5000. / We will read the
version found in John's gospel then. / But a very similar story is found right here in Mark. / In
fact in Mark - - the story of the feeding of the 5000 comes in BETWEEN - - two accounts of
Jesus trying to retreat and rest.

Maybe part of how we prepare to be nourished - - is to rest.

And part of what we do after we rest - - is eat food.

We need nourishment - - BOTH for our bodies - - and our souls.

If we don't get it - - life can be a challenge.

But we won't be nourished if we think that it's JUST about being ALONE.

Prayer - - and the life of faith - - are about good relationships.

A French poet reflecting on the Lord's prayer offers a shocking version in which he
seems to just want to be alone - - and leave God out of it. / He writes:

“Our Father who art in heaven

Stay there

And well stay here on earth”

As I read those words, I can certainly understand needing a break from religion because
of the damage that has been done in God's name. / And I can imagine even associating the evil
in this world with God. / But - - I hope that we don't get stuck at the point of this poem.

Whatever we think of the problems of this world - - hopefully we can still believe that God can be involved in our lives a good ways. / Yes sometimes we just need a little rest - - and some alone time to sort things out. / Crowds can be annoying.

But we also live - - in relationships.

SO - - hopefully we can find time to listen for God's voice as well.

As Mark's gospel describes the crowds, it says they were like "sheep without a shepherd"

They sought Jesus out because they felt compelled.

They experienced Jesus need for rest as - - abandonment.

They struggle to let Jesus have what he needs, because of what they think they need.

This can be a struggle in relationships too.

What the gospel tries to show us - - I believe - - is that even in withdrawing - - Jesus is STILL the shepherd. / Jesus is not leaving them without a shepherd - - Jesus is preparing to give them nourishment - - and help them live more fully.

In fact when the disciples ask Jesus to just feed the crowd - - he says "YOU give them something to eat". / Jesus will help provide what we need - - but we have to participate too - - and find our own way - - at least some of the time.

So may we all find the time and place to rest when we need to.

But remember that we are resting not to stop - - but to continue.

When we find ourselves alone - - we don't need to be lonely.

Because we always have a shepherd in Jesus - - wherever we are.

[In the next few minutes in quiet, I encourage you to write and pray about the months ahead]

Take 3 minutes...