

Ephesians 2:11-22 ~ Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Where We Rest

8th Sunday after Pentecost ~ Sacrament of Holy Baptism ~ July 18, 2021

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Introduction to Scripture:

They're back! Two weeks ago, when Janet preached on Mark 6:1-13, Jesus sent out his twelve disciples two by two, to do his healing work on their own. Apparently, things went surprisingly well for them. And now, in today's text, they have returned, exhilarated but exhausted. If Jesus had a Ukulele band, I'm sure he would have had them playing that tune for his twelve, road weary, but giddy disciples, now called "apostles," because they had been sent on a mission, and crushed it!

I'm guessing you may know the feeling: setting out to do something new that seems difficult, if not impossible. But you know it's important. Something you wondered, more than once, how in the world you were really going to pull it off. And then, somehow, you did! Something like being a new parent: exhilarating and exhausting. Or launching a new business. Or starting a new career path. Are we doing this? And when do we get a break?

Having just had the deep joy and fun of camping for two weeks in Montana with our three granddaughters who are three years, one year, and 5 months old, Bob and I were reminded of the 24/7 energy required at this stage of parenting. Two of those nights were spent in our tent *with* Isabel, our three-year old: her first camping experience. Of course, there were also her "stuffies" named Bunny, Pengie (a Penguin), and Big Baby all having their first night of camping, as well. It was a full tent, and a long first night: Exhilarating and exhausting. Let us now partake in the sacred as we open our weary hearts and souls and minds to God's Holy word.

Sermon:

Your body needs sleep. Just like it needs air, and water and food to function at its best. To be the whole amazing person that God created you to be, we need, yes, rest. When we sleep, our bodies heal themselves and restore their chemical balance. While we are sleeping our brains forge new thought connections and strengthen memory retention. Prolonged lack of sleep can cause serious psychological risks such as impulsive behavior, anxiety, depression, paranoia, and suicidal thoughts.¹ This has been a terrible year for mental health. Drug overdose deaths rose nearly 30% due to increased isolation and disrupted treatment. Extreme lack of sleep or deep rest can lead any of us into the danger zone of bad judgment, angry words, or worse, for people at any age. We say and do things that cannot be unsaid or undone. We narrow down and close off our view points. We overreact and we undermine our power to let God's Love rule and burst the log jam, or level the mountain peak that has stopped us dead in our tracks.

Have you ever heard of a "resiliency meter"? I learned about it from our eldest daughter Emily. As the mother of two very small children, she has observed that when they are tired or out of sorts, and then experience a minor setback, like a tumble and a scraped knee or the denial of a second popsicle, the small incident it becomes a major battle: tears, stomping, angry, mean

words. On the resiliency meter, this indicates they are nearing zero, that is low or no resiliency. But if they are better rested, more centered and grounded in their sense of self, the very same set back is shrugged off, the child barely misses a beat. Resiliency meter reads high. Thanks be to God. I think the same holds true not only for children but also for teenagers, and adults of any age. When we are on the low end of our resiliency meter, look out. Bad things can happen. And have. Think about most of the dumb things, the hurtful things that we have done to others, the bad decisions: I will bet you were tired and exhausted. Your “resilience meter” was on zero or less.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons Jesus told his exhilarated and exhausted apostles, as they returned to him, bubbling with news of their newfound healing powers to, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” They needed to restore and resupply their weary bodies and spirits. Mark uses the phrase “a deserted place” not once, but twice in two verses here (v. 31 & 32). When the Bible talks about “a deserted place” it’s a code word, for a place you go, or your faith community goes, to reconnect with who and whose you really are. We see this pattern again and again, from Genesis to Revelation. In the deserted place, we are able to remember the truth of our baptismal blessing: You are God’s beloved child. You belong. As we heard in Ephesians 2:19, You are a *citizen* with the saints (and all those ukuleles) regardless of your immigration status; and a member of the *household* of God, no matter where you live: on your friend’s couch, in your car, or in a house with your own bed to sleep in. Regardless of your physical household situation, you have a place in God’s household of faith. And you have a purpose, a shared purpose.

That’s what we baptized Braxton into today. We all just made big promises to Braxton, to his parents, and to God. We reaffirmed who and whose we believe we are. We did not promise that we’d get it right every time. We didn’t promise to be perfect. We did promise to stay open and in relationship with the One who came to heal us all. The One who overcame hostility and dividing walls on the cross. That means we promised to follow Christ into places and conversations we might rather not go. We promised to do our best to choose what is right and what is just over what is easy and popular. Today, thanks to Braxton and his parents, we all got a chance to reconnect with who and whose we are. To remember, to recall what gives us meaning and purpose: no matter what age or stage of life we may be in.

Of Braxton has *no* idea what happened to him today. *We* may have heard the saints dancing, but Braxton doesn’t know the words or the meaning of “When the Saints Go Marching In.” Not yet. Nor *will* he know unless we all make good on the promises that we just made. The thing about these promises made by his parents, his sponsors, by everyone in this congregation, and by the children here today: they aren’t really about the spectacular miracles. These promises are kept mostly in the everyday, the up and down, the block and tackle, of the between moments like the ones in our gospel text today.

In our gospel reading today, we didn’t get to hear about the big miracle stories like the feeding of the 5,000 or of Jesus walking on water (which are told in Mark 6:35-52, the verses we skipped). Today, was a lesson in the everyday choices that build resilience and solid, life-giving

connections: The choice to listen. To listen to one's own heart. To listen to our child, even when we are in a hurry. The choice to listen, really listen to an opposing point of view. We can do these things, and we must do them, because our identity, rooted in Christ, is our peace. Christ, "who has broken down the dividing wall, that is the hostility that is between us", as the writer of Ephesians teaches us.

Yes, on the cross Christ put to death the hostilities that divide us. And yet, we know here in 2021 hostility seems to be, if anything, on the rise. When our collective "resistance meter" hovers at Zero, or less, our hostilities rise, divisions become deadly. Dividing walls are erected, not only metaphorically, but literally. We can hardly listen to the news without hearing about one kind of division or another. Political hostilities continue to heat up almost as much as the record-breaking heat wave in the Northwest reaching up into Western Canada. Sacramento, California broke its record just yesterday with temperatures up to 113 degrees. I hear an invitation today to check our own "resiliency meter" and if it is hovering near zero or less, to consider where we rest. Where and how do we "come away to a deserted place" to connect with who and whose we really are? The answer is different for each of us.

I want to share a piece of Cold War history that can give us all hope in the power of resting in God's promises, even and especially when the powers of darkness threaten to overwhelm us. It was in 1961 that the German Democratic Republic quickly constructed a wall to separate the two Germanies. In part it was to keep out the West, but even more importantly, it was to keep the people of the GDR in. As the people began to realize what was happening, more and more tried to escape to the West. You may recall the news reports filled with horrifying images of people throwing children out of windows beside the wall. Although hundreds fled to the West successfully, many were killed.ⁱⁱ A literal wall of division and hostility remained in place for over 25 years.

You likely know that the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, 28 years later. You may not have heard that it was accomplished by a movement that began as a quiet practice of resilience, now called "the Velvet Revolution." It began with just handful of young adults praying at the Nikolai Kirche in Leipzig, at first just 10 days a year, and then stepping it up to every Monday evening. They began their prayers to protest specifically the stationing of middle-range missiles that so dangerously close. But God had bigger plans. Their quiet, yet persistent practice of praying every Monday evening spread to many other little churches all over East Germany, including the village of Wittenberg.

No one suspected that this prayer practice would grow into 70,000 people gathering on October 9, 1989. Without the help of social media to spread the word! This event took those in power completely by surprise. "We had everything planned, we were prepared for all eventualities, just not for candles and prayers." This was a quote from a pamphlet I picked up at the Nikolai Church in 2013 where I was studying about young adult spirituality, while my husband taught in Wittenberg, Germany for a semester. While there, I got to know a local woman named Renate Skirl, who had grown up as a young adult Christian behind the Iron

Curtain. She shared with me her memories of how this movement started with just 15- 20 people praying and singing together for a half an hour.

Never underestimate the power of candles and prayers. When we choose to rest in the peace of Christ, walls can be broken down, hostility melted and new pathways forged. When we choose to say “no” the forces that would lead us astray “like sheep without a shepherd” (Mark 6:34) and say “yes” to our Good Shepherd, relying on God’s promises to us all. Saying, “yes” and living like we truly believe that God’s image is in every person.

This makes me wonder: Where do we, as individuals and as a community of faith, choose to rest? Do you rest in the promise of the covenant? Or perhaps, day to day, honestly, it is something or someone else. What about when your resilience meter is on zero or worse: Do you rely on the strength of the community? That’s what we’re here for today. We need to gather to remember, that scrolling our favorite social media sites or binge-watching Netflix, may be entertaining, but these devices will not give us peace. Here, worshipping together, we can be reminded that Christ is our peace and whatever our differences, we are one body. Thanks to Jesus, we are never left to our own devices. Jesus has gone before us, and Jesus is still teaching us how to do this.

You may be facing a wall of resistance or hostility in one form or another right now. Whatever it may be for you, remember, the Berlin Wall did not come down over night. It took days and weeks and years of faithful, prayerful resistance to the power of evil and division and hostility. Jesus is right here today reminding us: Love wins. Whatever your differences, Christ’s love is bigger. In Christ’s love is our peace. Mark tells us that “all who touched even the fringe of his cloak were healed.” No questions asked about worthiness. No forms to fill out, or credentials required. Christ is about healing and compassion.

That’s the faith that we baptized Braxton into this day. The water we placed on Braxton’s head, the prayers we offered, the promises we made are one way that Jesus teaches us to make that truth real for Braxton. God has done God’s part: will we do ours? I know we can, with God’s help. I know we can, if we rest in Christ’s peace, and open ourselves to what God can do.

Let us pray: *Creator of the rivers and oceans, who washes us clean and refreshes us daily, help us to be like a cup of cold water to others in your name: refreshing, cleansing and relieving.*
Amen.

ⁱ [<https://www.healthline.com/health/sleep-deprivation/effects-on-body#Central-nervous-system>]

ⁱⁱ Lucy Lind Hogan, *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship*, ed. Green, Long, Powery, Rigby & Sharp, (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, KY, 2021), Year B, Volume 3, p.174.