

In order to introduce the sermon today let me show you a brief video. (Video about German coastguard trainee who, on his first day staffing the distress calls, receives a call in English: 'Mayday, mayday ... we are sinking, we are sinking'. The German responds: "What are you thinking about'.)

Sinking or Thinking? In a light hearted way this video shows the trauma of translation that Jeanette highlighted some Sundays ago. And in the context of our text today we ask what Mark was thinking in retelling these stories? And what should we be thinking as we try to apply the story for us, for our Church? What does it mean for us?

This morning, I would like to focus on vs. 31 where the disciples have just come back from their mission, satisfied, weary, hungry, and Jesus says to them, and I paraphrase: 'Come with me now, come away, alone but together, and rest.' Come and rest!

We know that this text is part of a major theme in the Gospel story of Mark that, actually forms a major block in the gospel from Ch. 6:vs 6 to ch.8 verse30. And that in this block are two important feeding stories, one being our text, and the other at Ch. 8:vs1-10. The action of Jesus in both these feeding stories – taking the loaves, looking up to heaven, giving thanks, breaking bread and giving it to the disciples - are clear and obvious links to the last supper and to the celebration of the Eucharist, the communion, that most likely Marks community shared and we too follow. And around these feeding stories, grounded in the nourishment that the Eucharistic Jesus brings in fellowship around the table, Mark includes a collection of stories, teaching and miracles stories, where we learn what is the essence of discipleship.

And interestingly, in our text, Mark has it that they venture by boat to find this place of rest, but the crowds come and so Jesus goes ashore and teaches them. And it got late, so the disciples rally to Jesus – send them away Jesus, its late, no doubt they are hungry, send them away so they may eat. But Jesus says to them: 'No ...' In fact he says something more ... 'I am not going to send them away, in fact I am not going to feed them ... you are'. 'You give them something to eat'. If we dare enter into the drama of this, what must have the disciples felt? We can only imagine: 'What? What is he talking about? We haven't the resources? Five loaves and two fish is all we can muster ... and doesn't he appreciate we have just come back from an intensive mission, walking village to village, not knowing what to expect. We are tired and drained. And wasn't this supposed to be our place of rest'.

The images of the disciples in the boat can be interpreted symbolically, the boat is often used as a symbol of the church, so we can assume that what Mark is thinking is not just the stuff about the disciples but about his church. Mark is using this story to challenge his church about what it means to be a disciple, and more fundamentally what it means to be church. That as church

they, and we, are called by the Eucharistic Jesus to feed the crowd. That discipleship and mission is about compassion and mercy for the hungry; its about hospitality.

And set where it is, after the missionary endeavor of the disciples, Mark has Jesus challenge them what they lacked, that mission fundamentally requires – radical compassion.

And set just after the beheading of John, Mark wants all to know that this radical compassion is costly, dangerous even.

All of this is in the context of rest. So what can we say about that? What can our thinking be about that? The disciples were tired and needed rest. Jesus invites them to do that. And Jesus himself took rest in vs 45. We all need rest ... we all need rest to continue on in mission. What Mark is thinking about is helping his church learn again about radical compassion but what I would like to do, in applying this text for us today, in thinking what it means for us, is focus on this idea of rest. Rest in the context of mission; rest in the context of the imperative from Jesus to feed the hungry crowds. And I do that because one of our key goals as church is to deepen our spiritual life. So what has rest got to do with that?

Rest is leisure, it is our time out. And like all holidays or HOLY days it is a time to break free from the construct of work and recuperate and re-gather. A natural order of things. Necessary. But I want to pitch this theologically and say that rest is written into the very order of creation, that rest in our week is the Sabbath, the day set apart. Rest is necessary, but it is also part of the creative order of God, it is spiritual. And in the very heart of what is Sabbath, rest, in the creation story of Genesis, is an act of love by God, who after the business of the creative work, on the seventh day, God rests. It is a Divine Rest. For those of us reared in the protestant ethic - work hard, play hard - we may not immediately perceive the importance of the Sabbath orientation of creation. Because here Divine Rest is not simply a pause in the working week, a chance to catch one's breath before the pursuit of profit continues, its not meant to be a relaxing time, a time to go to our shopping malls or to watch the football. Divine Rest, true Sabbath, our Sunday, means that at the heart of creation is humanity's free respite from everything we do, in order to restore and re-gather spiritually, it is a time to reflect and pray and rekindle the reason for work. The reason for mission. It is a spiritual and physical retreat. And what I would like to suggest this morning is that this spiritual and physical retreat, this Divine Rest, is found in our collective worship of God.

One writer has this to say about worship:

*In the creation account the Sabbath, our Sunday, is depicted as the day when the human being, in the freedom of worship, participates in God's freedom, in God's rest, and thus in God's peace. To celebrate the Sabbath means to celebrate the covenant. It means to return to the source and to sweep away all the defilement that our work has brought with it. It also means*

*going into a place in which there will no longer be slaves and masters but only free children of God—to share together as kin in God's peace and freedom.*

That is heady stuff ... but what it leads us to, in thinking about this text, is that, our Sunday, our Sabbath, our Divine Rest is part of creation, and is part of our own weekly creation praxis: that, during the week, we are engaged in incredibly difficult, consuming activity, it may be work or it may even be the stuff the retirees do, for what really is work, and even for you who are retirees for every one engaged in weekly activity, work, all of us need to find a time and a space away from it, we need to get away from that, to rethink, re-energize, restore, be redeemed ... in a Sabbath rest. Worship.

Worship, then, can be seen as fundamentally grounded in the essence of the creative order of God: it is our time of reflecting after the doing; the prayer after the activity; the oasis after the desert demands of mission. Come away and rest says Jesus. What we do here and now is Sabbath Divine Rest; it is part of the language of spirituality; it is the grammar of creation itself.

It is put beautifully in the NT reading from Ephesians: as we nurture our faith and spirituality, we draw closer to the heart of God. In Christ Jesus, you who were once far off, have been brought near. We become citizens with the saints, members of the household of God. Here in worship!

And I guess too, for me, the anchor in our worship is not the pulpit, dare I say that here and now as I preach, not the pulpit, but the table, and that is why the table is central in our place of worship. Reflecting and hearing God's word is important but in our worship and in particular in our communion each month we share in a sacred meal where we are sustained physically and spiritually, and reminded, as we see in this text, in the midst of our work and mission, like the disciples in Mark, that Jesus is the source, that he is the one loaf, made evident in our story and then later in ch 8:14. Jesus is revealed to be the resource that can transform us and satisfy us, and that it is this loaf, the bread of life, who calls us to live his example of radical compassion and be available 'to give bread' to the crowds whom we meet daily during the week. So what we learn is that the hospitality of God's provision is located in the essence of rest, in our Worship; and the message Mark has for us is that, here, we will be satisfied and spiritually fed to live our lives and to carry on in mission.

An interesting thought is this from Parker Palmer, that in many ways in this story, we too are like the hungry crowd, with little physical or perhaps spiritual resources to manage things in our daily life, little affirmation or validation that we are deeply loved, but that in this feeding story set in the context of rest, here in the encounter with Jesus, in the sharing of the meal, the crowd becomes community, people present to one another and for one another. In our worship we become again the community of grace.

So, what is this to do with deepening the spiritual life of the church? As part of the leadership, I want to say we are thinking about how we do that, because of the church life survey and I guess I want to flag today that we want to seriously help the church in that journey. Spirituality means many things to people. And we will be exploring that in the coming months and clarifying a kind of way forward, but today, given our text, the message is this: that our worship is important to spirituality, that worship may be a primary opportunity to deepen our spiritual life. It is often about attitude, but also understanding. Why do we brave the cold and come here Sunday mornings? And what really uplifts you, girds you? What supports you? What are you looking for?

The thread in the story is that like the disciples in Mark, we come here to 'be with the Spirit of Jesus, away, alone but together, to rest.' That here, we come and rest. Here we gather to pray, here right now, in our liturgy, in our prayers, in our singing, in our gathering, in our worship, here we find ways to know the embrace of God and the call of Jesus, again, to be people of compassion. Here we find the centre again of our faith, here we come to rest but and here is the thing ... it is not the reason, as Mark so much wanted to show his disciples ... we come and rest, we need to anchor ourselves in a wholesome deep spiritual faith, but we do that, SO THAT, SO THAT, we can go out into the world again to be redemptive heralds of God's vision. The week is our mission, out there is really the stuff of the Church, but here in our worship, here in our Sanctuary is Sabbath Divine Rest, here is the place of feeding and sustenance where we learn again the grace and Radical compassion required for mission.

There is a statue of Jesus that was wrecked during the war, just outside a small village in Normandy France. Its hands had been totally destroyed and the villagers discussed what they should do. One group thought that it should be trashed and a new one erected, another group objected and thought a village artisan could repair it, but finally the village decided that the statue be cleaned up and remain as it was – Jesus handless. And so they did, and at the base of it they put a plaque with the following inscription: I have no hands but yours. Mark is challenging us to find the loaf in our worship, and to be the bread to the crowds we meet during the week. We are called to rest but equally we are called to feed them and be his hands.

Mark reveals Jesus continuing to call us. The disciples and we may fail to get it, may fail to understand it, and in spite of ourselves often, even though we, too, may be tired just like the disciples in this story, Jesus feeds us, and here in worship we can encounter that sustenance and be redeemed and restored, again, renewed again, the spirit can be enlivened again, so we can go out to feed the crowd, to embody all that he was, to be his hands.