

I must make a note here about the readings and the writer of the book of Mark. Did you notice that we jumped in our readings from verse 34 to verse 53? I don't know why it was done but in-between is the feeding of the 5000 on the hillside –you know with the fish and the bread. But the writer takes this up again, I believe, next week.

Now onto the sermon. One of my favorite Old Testament stories is about Naaman, the Syrian army commander. Naaman is a very important guy. I picture him dressed in an impressive uniform, riding in a big chariot, and surrounded by his officers and staff. What happens is the Naaman contracts leprosy. His skin is a mess-big ugly blotches all over him.

He gets word from Elisha, the prophet that he can be cured of his leprosy by dipping himself in the Jordan River seven times, yet he resists doing this. His officers and staff approach him and say” ”Sir if the prophet had told you to do something difficult and dangerous to cure your leprosy, certainly you would have done it. Then why not do something as simple as dipping upirself seven times in the waters of the Jordan?’ These were wise words.

Naaman is a proud man, but he's not dumb. He concedes their point, goes straight to the Jordan, and by the time he's toweling himself off, the general's skin has become as fresh as the skin of a little child.

In today's gospel, Jesus tells his disciples to do something. What he says is “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.”

In other words, he tells them to take a break to devote some time to being rather than doing.

Often he tells us the same thing. “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest for a while.” Often he tells us to take a break and devote some of our time to being rather than doing.

Yet often we ignore this command. We want to follow Jesus and are willing to take action, but when it comes to rest, when it comes to Jesus telling us to take a break for a while, then we respond as Naaman did at first: We would do something big and brave, but rest is too simple, we say, and so we ignore what Jesus tells us.

Jesus has his reasons for inviting his disciples to rest. They have just returned from a mission on which he had dispatched them. He had sent them out in pairs and in haste. They were not to encumber themselves with gear or supplies, but simply trust local hospitality to meet their needs. They were not to linger where they were not wanted. Instead, they were to be on the move, calling people to repentance, casting out demons, anointing the sick. It was a work they had never done before and once they returned, they must have been exhausted.

Many of us do critically important work and find ourselves exhausted. Yet we don't rest. We may even believe that we cannot or should not rest. We push ourselves in a way that we would never push others. Our life may be productive, we may check off everything from our daily “to do” list, but deep down we recognize something is wrong, that we lack a sense of deep meaning, and so we feel cheated.

The disciples have returned from their travels, but the pace has not slackened. As the gospel reports “Many were comings and goings and

they had no leisure even to eat. Does that scene sound familiar to you? Is your life like that? Is your home like that? This is a common experience for people today. Many are coming and going and they have no leisure even to eat. Eating is not only the consuming of food. Eating is the social event when we renew ourselves with people we love. It is a renewing.

Jesus listens to the disciples as they report on all they did and taught in the numerous places they visited. He does not, however, tell them to throw themselves into action again with even greater abandon. He doesn't ask them to do something difficult and dangerous, big and brave. Instead, what he asks for is disarming in its simplicity, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest for a while." Jesus gets back into the boat to travel to the bay of Genneerest which is part of the Sea of Galilee. To travel across is about 6 miles. But when they arrive there are even more people waiting. That means that the sick and injured traveled around the lake which is about a 10 mile hike. And Jesus had compassion on them.

But still Jesus invites us to rest, yet we treat rest as a four-letter word. If people are resting, we may be suspicious of them. If we are resting, we may be suspicious of ourselves. There's always more to do, further way to justify our existence by what we produce. In the face of this, Jesus smiles and say "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest for a while."

If asked, most of us could recite something of the pattern of our work as we engage in it day by day, week after week. I wonder, though, Can we do the same regarding our rest? Do we have patterns established

that insure that going off by ourselves to rest for a while is a reality for us, rather than a simple desire?

We may lack such patterns of rest, but we can take steps to establish them. Gradually we can build into our lives rhythms of rest and solitude to balance out the busy rhythms that already pulsate so strongly. It can be done.

The French mathematician and theologian Blaise Pascal once said that more than half this world's ills come from how people cannot sit in a room alone. Our refusal to rest can hurt us, the people around us, and the endeavors to which we devote ourselves.

A lot of us try to function without the Rest Factor that Jesus wants us to include in our lives. We're plenty busy, the results are disappointing. When we factor in some rest, some Sabbath time, we are not working as much, but what we do is more significant, more meaningful than it was when we were always on the go.

Like Naaman the Syrian commander, we may be willing to do something dangerous and daring, big and brave, when what we're asked to do is something simple we hesitate. Naaman needed to slip into the Jordan River's healing waters. What we are asked to do is equally simple" to slip into the healing waters of a life that makes room for regular rest, a life marked by Sabbath time. AMEN