

2 Samuel 7:1-14a
Psalm 89:20-37
Ephesians 2:11-22
Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

No one in this room is a stranger to multiple demands being made on us on a daily basis. We have to go to work or school; we have to do household chores; we have to shop for what we need; and we want to socialize with people who are important to us. And every now and then, we'd like to pursue a hobby that we find refreshing for us. Where does it all end? There's not enough time to do all the things we must do and all the things we would like to do. There just isn't. And time is quantitative: you can't store it up and you can't make more of it. We have what we have and we have to figure out how to divide it up among the many demands put on us. We have to figure out how to balance all of it. Everyone we know is in the same boat whether they are following a religious faith or not. For us, as Christians, it's a matter of struggling to fit into our lives the things we feel called to do for God and for Christ in the face of all the other demands being placed on us.

Today's gospel lesson from Mark directs our attention to this same problem that Jesus and the disciples faced as his ministry unfolds. The lectionary choice for today leaves out two of the most important miracles that Jesus performed: the feeding of the 5,000 with a teaching about the Beatitudes and his walking on water when his disciples run into a storm on the Sea of Galilee.

These passages that we heard this morning are bookends to the miracle stories in between and they deserve our attention. As we pick up the story this morning, Jesus' disciples have just returned from their first mission trip and they're just bursting to tell Jesus all about it! Jesus seems more interested in getting them to settle down and have a little quiet time for themselves. De-briefing is good, but it can sometimes be just as exhausting as the experience itself. "You need to go off by yourselves to a wilderness place to rest and be restored." Jesus is trying to help them find the balance between doing for others and taking care of themselves. And don't we know exactly what that's like. We, too, need to figure out the balance between what we are doing for others....how we 'spend' ourselves for others...and how we get our batteries recharged.

While the disciples depart for this wilderness place, the crowds figure out where they are going and race on ahead of them to greet them when they arrive. They pick up people along the way,

too, because when the disciples and Jesus finally arrive at a place they had thought was going to be desolate and give them quiet and refuge, they discover the sea of people waiting for them...5,000 or so. Even though Jesus has instructed his disciples to go off by themselves and rest, he allows the crowd to interrupt this retreat. Apparently, great compassion is more compelling than meeting personal need. It's a balancing act. That may happen to us as well.

When Jesus finishes feeding the souls of the crowd with the beatitudes, he feeds them physically with 2 fishes and 5 loaves of bread. Jesus has figured out the balance between food for the soul and food for the body. We all need both! When he's done, Jesus puts his disciples in a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee and he goes up on the mountain to pray. Jesus takes his own advice...which is sometimes what we fail to do for ourselves...and he retreats to a place alone to be restored. Jesus seems to have great respect for the human side of his nature even as he shares the power of the divine side. Just like us, Jesus needs to find the balance between taking care of others and taking care of himself.

Jesus is modelling for his disciples...and for us...the importance of finding the right balance in our lives as Christians. Through the years since Jesus walked the earth, there have been numerous lifestyles that human beings have adopted to try to apply what Jesus modelled in his own life. The rules that people follow to follow in the footsteps of Jesus' life and teachings are sometimes called a Rule of Life. Have you ever thought of what your Rule of Life practices might be? Have you ever written them down or examined them?

This scripture passage this morning is the perfect segue into sharing with you a Rule of Life that our Presiding Bishop shared in his sermon during the opening service of Holy Eucharist at the 79th General Convention of the Episcopal Church which was convened in Austin, Texas last week. In that sermon at, Bishop Curry, spelled out a Rule of Life that builds on his energy for teaching that the Way of Love is the essence of Jesus' mandate and command to us. Bishop Curry shared with all of those present at the convention The Way of Love which is a set of Practices for a Jesus-Centered Life. Let's take a look!! The logo for this Rule of Life is on an insert in your bulletin this morning.

There are seven practices that will help us stay focused on making Jesus the center of our lives:

Turn- Pause, listen, and choose to follow Jesus. Like the disciples, we are called by Jesus to follow the Way of Love. With God's help, we can turn from the powers of sin, hatred, fear, injustice and oppression toward the way of truth, love, hope, justice, and freedom. In turning, we reorient our lives to Jesus Christ, falling in love again, and again, and again. Like a plant in a dark space, we physically turn from the darkness toward the light.

Learn-By reading and reflecting on Scripture, especially the life and teachings of Jesus, we draw near to God and God's word dwells in us. When we open our minds and hearts to Scripture, we learn to see God's story and God's activity in everyday life. When we can see it in the lives of Biblical characters, it's easier to see it in our own lives.

Pray-Jesus teaches us to come before God with humble hearts, boldly offering our thanksgivings and concerns to God or simply listening for God's voice in our lives and in the world. Whether in thought, word or deed, individually or corporately, when we pray we invite and dwell in God's loving presence.

Worship-When we worship, we gather with others before God. We hear the Good News of Jesus Christ, we give thanks; we confess; and we offer the brokenness of the world to God. As we break bread, our eyes are opened to the presence of Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are made one body, the body of Christ sent forth to live the Way of Love.

Bless-Jesus called his disciples to give, forgive, teach, and heal in his name. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to bless everyone we meet, practicing generosity and compassion, and proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ with hopeful words and selfless actions. We can share our stories of blessing and invite other to the Way of Love.

Go-Cross boundaries, listen deeply and live like Jesus. As Jesus went to the highways and byways, he sends us beyond our circles of comfort, to witness to the love, justice, and truth of God with our lips and with our lives. We go to listen with humility and to join God in healing a hurting world. We go to become Beloved Community, a people reconciled in love with God and with one another.

Rest-Receive the gift of God's grace, peace and restoration. From the beginning of creation, God has established the sacred pattern of going and returning, of labor and rest. Especially today, God invites us to dedicate time for restoration and wholeness-within our bodies, minds, and souls, and within our communities and institutions. By resting we place our trust in God, the primary actor who brings all things to their fullness.

Just remember one thing: no matter how beleaguered you are, or worried you are, or frightened you are...God's in charge...always has been, always will be.

Our Scripture readings today speak to this Way of Love that Bishop Curry has mapped out for us. In the Old Testament lesson from the book of Samuel we heard about all the plans to build a

place in which God could dwell. When in fact, the place that God dwells is within the hearts and bodies of all those who love God and are in relationship with God. The letter to the Ephesians written by St. Paul reminds us that through Jesus we all have access to God and can all be members of the household of God. Jesus is the chief cornerstone of this household of God. And the power that lies in the fringes of Jesus' garments...the power that healed the sick and the crippled at Gennesaret...is the same power that is available to us through our relationship with Jesus.

Finding the time and the space for all of this is our challenge. It seems impossible so much of the time to make room for God. And yet, God is the source of all light and life and power. We may think it's just a balancing act that is too difficult for us to master, but it's not. It's simply a matter of deciding it is truly what we want...and then asking for it.

Through Him, all things are possible.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.