

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹ **Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”**

³² **So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.** ³³ **But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.** ³⁴ **When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.** (NIV84)

Theme: Come to Jesus for True Rest

1. He gives us spiritual rest.
2. We give rest to others.

Sometimes we just need a break. Sometimes we just need to get away from it all. We get worn down and tired. We need to go on vacation and get refreshed. That way when we come back, we can take on our duties with vigor and full of energy. I should know we just got back from a two-week vacation last night. It was good. It was nice to get some rest—both physically and emotionally.

But as great as it is to get physical rest is, spiritual rest is far more important. For this we come to Jesus. For he gives us spiritual rest through his Word. And so, we give rest to others.

As our text begins Jesus' disciples were returning from a mission trip. Jesus had sent them throughout the region to preach the gospel and perform miracles in his name. They were tired. They had walked all over the area. They had spent countless hours dealing with sin, preaching the gospel. They faced diseases and demons. They needed some rest. But they couldn't find any because a large crowd was all around them. So they needed a mini vacation of sorts. They just needed to get away from it all and spend some time with Jesus. Jesus knew they needed physical and emotional rest. So they got in a boat to go to a remote place.

As he did with the disciples, Jesus has blessed us with many opportunities to do get some physical rest. We live in a country where we don't have to work all the time. We are able to provide for our families without working 100 hours a week. Some of us even get paid while we are on vacation. And we are always more than eager to stop working for the day. We love it when we get a day off of work. For months we look forward to taking a vacation. We understand the importance of physical and emotional rest. And do all we can take make sure we get it and enjoy it—spending hundreds or thousands of dollars to make sure it happens.

This kind of rest is important, but it's not the type of rest that we truly need. Jesus and his disciples understood that. The disciples weren't just getting away to get away. They were getting away to be with Jesus. They wanted to be refreshed by listening to his word. They wanted to get away so they could concentrate on what his was going to say to them. They wanted to be spiritually refreshed.

Jesus invites us to do the same thing as he did with the disciples. He wants to take us aside—to go with us to a quiet place so we may hear him speak to us. He invites us to receive pure refreshment and nourishment from him in his Word. That is what he gives to each one of us in our private devotional life. He comes to us in his word and personally reminds each and everyone of us of the forgiveness of sins he won for us. He refreshes us as he reminds us of his grace—his undeserved love he has for us. It doesn't matter what is going on in our lives. It doesn't matter what we are facing and the issues we are dealing with. For those short 15-30 minutes everyday we don't have a care in the world—except God and his grace. And we come away refreshed and ready to face the sin-filled world once again.

Of course it's not just through the personal devotions that God gives us spiritual rest. During our Worship services God comes to us. The songs we sing during the liturgy, the psalms and hymns, the readings, and the sermon, all contain the gospel. Through them, God refreshes his children as he assures and reminds them of his grace. As much as we hear God's Word during worship services, we really don't get to learn all that much. It is at Bible Classes that we get to sit down and really get to know God and his grace. It is where we get to study his Word together with our fellow believers so that we may find rest for

our souls. In the Lord's Supper we also receive rest for our souls. For Jesus gives each one of us personally his true body and blood. In a tangible way, he gives us the forgiveness of sins along with a new life and salvation.

How sad is it then when we fail to take full advantage of the rest that Christ offers. Christ makes his word available to us whenever we want it. We have that opportunity every day through personal devotions. Some of us have those. For others, life gets in the way—our favorite tv show is on, homework needs to get done, the kids need to be dropped off at that event, you need to go for a run, and the excuses could go on and on. Worship services are held every week. And yet, once again, life often gets in the way. You have to work, or sleep in because you had a hard week or a rough Saturday night, fish need to be caught, friends asked you to do something. And before you know it you haven't heard God's word, or sung his praises in a month, or all summer, or perhaps not since Easter. In the past we have offered the Lord's Supper once a month, twice a month starting in August. And on the first Sunday of each month, a few more members will show up—perhaps 5 or so. But there are still many who haven't not received the forgiveness of sins through the Lord's Supper in several months.

And yet, we wonder why we have so much stress and anxiety. We fret and worry over many things. We are constantly on edge. Many of us don't have peace in our lives. The problems we face are often too much. And sometimes we think we can take care of them on our own. That we don't need any help from any one, or any god. God offers us peace through his gospel, yet we may not ever look to his gospel for peace and rest. And soon the pressure seems too much to bear. And we become overwhelmed.

That is why Christ gives us his Word. It is he removes all anxiety and worry. For he reminds us of what we should truly worry about—sin and death. We should worry about how horrible of sinners we are. And because of our sin we deserve nothing but eternal punishment. But we aren't going to die because Christ lives a perfect life for us. And as he died on the cross he took all our sins upon himself. And he rose from the dead and assured us that we too will rise from the dead and all believers will join him in heaven forever. Sin and grace is the constant theme of the Bible. When we are reminded of God's grace to

us sinners, nothing else in this world really matters. All our so-called problems or issues really aren't that important and we no longer worry about them. When we go to God through the gospel, we find true rest.

We know this. Many of the Jews knew this. But many others do not. That is why, we, like the disciples spread the Word to others.

The large crowd that was following Jesus and the disciples didn't stop when they got into the boat. They ran along the shore of the lake. They longed to hear the gospel. They had a taste of the rest Jesus brought. And they wanted more. They gave up whatever they were doing. They put aside their lives for awhile. It may not have been convenient for them. They were running, often in rough terrain, just to hear the gospel.

May we show the same enthusiasm for Christ as they did. For us, the hear the gospel is easy. At anytime and any where we can read the Word. All we have to do is walk a few minutes, sit in the car for a few more, or open up a book and the gospel is right there in front of us. And because it's so easy, we often don't think about putting aside time or energy to sit down with the gospel. Older people today always complain that kids don't understand the value of hard work anymore—because things are given to them on a golden platter. They are used to getting what they want when they want it, often at no cost to them at all. So why work hard, why wait to get what you want? Then they don't push themselves much for anything. That is the type of thinking we can fall into in our spiritual lives. The gospel is readily available to us on a golden platter called Scripture. But because it's so readily available we become lazy in our study of Scripture, and often fail to make use of the means of grace.

And then we become what some of those Jews were—sheep without a shepherd. Jesus is the Great Shepherd. He watches over his creation like a shepherd watches over his helpless sheep. He protects them against all their enemies. Christ watches over our spiritual lives. He guards and protects us against anyone who attacks our faith. Christ leads us not to trust in ourselves for forgiveness and eternal life, but in him alone. He makes sure the devil does not lead us into despair. Jesus knew that the Jews were sheep without a spiritual shepherd. So he put aside his wants and desires to lead them. He stopped and

preached the gospel to them and gave them the comfort and rest of forgiveness.

He does the same for us today. Today Jesus is still our shepherd today through the means of grace. But he also gives shepherds to watch over our spiritual lives. As we learned in our readings for this Sunday, he never leaves us without someone to watch over our faith. That is what the term pastor means—shepherd. They are chosen by Christ himself to watch over the spiritual lives of his believers. They faithfully preach and teach the gospel to give us the comfort of forgiveness and the peace and rest that only he can give. They administer the sacraments so that we may be assured of the love that Christ has for us.

But a pastor can only be a shepherd to those who want to be shepherded by him. So there are many people we know who are without a shepherd. In Standish and beyond, people don't know the peace of forgiveness. Their lives are full of turmoil and unrest. They are angry and bitter. Or perhaps they are happy, but only because they consider themselves good people who can earn their own way to eternal life. Worst of all, they have no true hope of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life because they have no true idea of who Jesus is and what he has done for them. They are spiritually lost, and most of them have no idea. They are in desperate need of someone to give them the true spiritual rest—the rest of Christ. They need someone to share the Word with them.

That is why the Good Shepherd has sent us pastors as shepherds. They spread the gospel to those who do not know it. They preach sermons, officiate during the worship service. They teach God's Word during Bible Class, BIC classes, Confirmation Classes, and so on. But that doesn't exclude us from spreading the gospel as well. For each one of us can reach more people than the pastor alone. Each one of us has friend, relatives, and other acquaintances that do not know Christ. Perhaps they have just gone through a tough stretch in their lives. They are stressed out. They are spiritually lost.

And that is the perfect opportunity for each one of us to tell them about their Savior. For Jesus knows what it is like living in this world. He understands how we feel and what we are going through. And so he died on the cross. He took away the guilt of all our sins and gives us

the gift of eternal life in heaven. He takes away what causes true anxiety; he gives us peace of mind. And so we are refreshed. We can give this spiritual refreshment to all we meet. That the forgiveness of sins and eternal life is our free, as a gift—without us having to work for it. And that is true rest. It is something we never get tired of hearing.

We work hard so we can earn a vacation. We long for that vacation rest to come. But that rest lasts only until the next work day begins. God invites us to find spiritual rest through his gospel—his gospel that is readily available to us in all times and places. And no matter what happens in our lives, we know that we can get the spiritual vacation everyday—even more than once a day. And this spiritual rest leads us to give rest to others through the gospel. So we may be refreshed and ready to face the day until we have eternal rest with our heavenly father. Amen.