

“Do You Have a Servant’s Heart?”

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

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I look forward to hearing reports from our mission teams when they return home. As soon as I see team leaders or participants on a trip, I ask them to tell me about their experience. I want to know where they went, what they did, how they were received and what impact the trip had on them, as well as the people they served.

I get the feeling Jesus did the same thing after sending his disciples into the surrounding villages to help those who were in need. Don’t you sense his eagerness to hear from his disciples by what Mark wrote in today’s text? “The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.” How affirming and encouraging this must have been for the disciples.

It did not take Jesus long, however, to see how tired the disciples were. So busy were they that they even neglected to eat at times. This was why he insisted that they follow him to a secluded place so they could rest.

In the words of the Psalmist, Jesus’ attempts to “make them lie down in green pastures” were futile. Crowds kept showing up where they went and Jesus could not turn them away. He touched, taught, fed and healed them.

How does this text speak to us today? It reminds me that followers of Jesus must have a servant’s heart and helps me identify the people around me that need special attention: those who are exhausted and need rest, those who are lost and need guidance and those who are sick and need medical attention. Let me explain.

In an earlier passage, Jesus sent the disciples into the countryside and villages to preach and heal those who were sick. You recall that he told them to travel light. “Take nothing for your journey except a staff—no bread, no bag and no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic” Mark 6: 8-9.

When they returned to Jesus, people followed them and continued to ask for help. Jesus knew how stressful this was and invited the disciples to follow him to a secluded or uninhabited place where they could rest.

Aren’t you impressed with Jesus’ concern for his disciples? I am. He’s a good role model, especially for those in leadership.

About whom are you concerned? Who needs rest among your family members and friends? What can you do to help them?

I’m spending quite a bit of time listening these days. I don’t recall when people were more stressed and anxious. Companies have downsized and thrown extra work on those who remain on the job. Those who are looking for work are having trouble sleeping. In our culture, children are involved in more activities than ever before and parents never have a moment to call their own. These are busy days and stress may be at an all time high.

Last Sunday’s edition of the comic strip, *Baby Blues*, was priceless. A mother of two children relaxes in a bubble bath with a book in her hand. Someone knocks on the door. “Mom?” “What,” she reluctantly replies. “Where are you?” “I’m in the tub.” “Where?” “I’m in the bathtub!” “The bathroom bathtub?” “Yes, the bathroom bathtub!” “Why?” “BECAUSE I NEED TO SPEND SOME TIME RELAXING SO I CAN CONTINUE TO BE A PLEASANT PERSON TO BE AROUND!”

The final scene shows this mother’s daughter holding up two dolls in front of her brother with a look of horror on her face. “Who keeps biting the heads off my dolls?” she asks. Her brother responds, “I think mom does it while she’s relaxing!”

This reminds me of the mother that worked hard cleaning and waxing the kitchen floor and announced to her family, “The first one that spills anything on this floor will spend one hour

in time out.” She then pours some water on the floor and says to her startled family, “I’ll see you in an hour!”

Who do you know that is under a lot of stress? What can you do to help them? Are there some responsibilities and chores you could help with that would lighten their load? Could you prepare a meal and take it to them? Could you give a young couple a night out by taking care of their children for an evening?

This week, express your concern for someone dealing with a lot of stress and ask what you could do to help them. Even the offer will lift their spirit.

At the same time, don’t neglect yourself. Even caregivers need rest because of the tendency to neglect their own needs. Perhaps this is why the longest of the Ten Commandments is the call to remember the Sabbath.

The place Jesus wanted to take the disciples to rest was one familiar to him. Mark implies that he had been to this place or one like it after his first healing miracles (1:35).

The secluded place that Jesus wanted to take the disciples was not so isolated, though. When they arrived, people were waiting for them. Instead of being rude or impatient, however, Mark said that Jesus “had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd and he began to teach them many things” Mark 6:34.

You know what sheep without a shepherd do. They wander aimlessly, which results in getting lost or in harm’s way.

Who do you know that has lost his or her way and is wandering aimlessly? Are they in a dangerous situation? What can you do to help them?

Children sometimes lose their way, don’t they? Try to be as patient with them as Jesus was with these lost sheep. Be a good role model and stable influence in their lives. Help them find their bearings.

Adults can lose their way for many reasons. The loss of a job or break-up of a relationship can cause a person to wander. Mistakes that result in devastating consequences can derail someone. Even retirement can undermine a person’s purpose for living. Be sensitive to those that are struggling and ask God to show you ways you can help them.

Still seeking for a place of rest, Jesus and the disciples went to another part of the Galilean coast only to be met by more people. This time, family and friends brought those who were sick to Jesus, hoping to find relief and healing.

Who do you know that is sick and needs medical attention? What can you do to help them? Could you provide transportation or accompany them as they go to the doctor? Could you prepare a meal or take a nourishing fruit and vegetable tray to them? Would a card, a phone call or a visit cheer them up?

Sick people usually live very isolated lives. This is fine for a while, especially if they are recovering. People who are chronically ill, however, need contact with caring friends and neighbors. Will you respond to someone’s need for a loving touch this week?

I hope you will and I know someone who will help you. I am also confident that he will be just as excited to listen to your experience as he did those first disciples.