

Sermon Preached on July 18, 2021 – Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

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St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, Yarmouth, ME 04096

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Psalm 23

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." Many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.

Years ago, when I was in seminary, a friend invited me to see a one-man show by the British actor Alec McGowan. It was the Gospel of Mark. He performed it, the King James Version, from memory, though he had a tiny bible as a prop. 'just in case,' he said. He was mesmerizing. He was extraordinary.

Much later I got a darknet - type parishioner to procure a pirated VHS tape of the show. Later again, I had the transferred to a DVD. As I was preparing this homily, I discovered that you can now watch the performance on You Tube. Do it. It will be two hours you won't forget, I promise.

One thing McGowan makes stunning clear is how physical, how busy, how frenetic even, is the pace of Mark's gospel. We all know it's the shortest gospel and the most enigmatic in many ways, but we aren't always aware of how furiously Jesus and his disciples travel around Palestine. The actor is constantly pacing the stage as he recounts their movements.

In Chapter 6 alone, from which today's Gospel reading comes, Jesus is rejected at Nazareth, sends out the disciples on their mission to cities and towns, feeds the five thousand, walks from Nazareth up to Galilee—that's about 17 rugged miles—walks on water as the disciples are sailing to Bethsaida, and heals the sick after they sail to Gennesaret.

Some commentary suggests that the rejection at Nazareth makes it apparent to Jesus that he must accelerate the pace of his ministry. That his treatment at Nazareth foretells his ultimate destiny. And in Chapter 6, our chapter for today, there's an inserted story (in seminary we learned to call them pericopes) about the beheading of John the Baptist. Mark is reminding us again about the fate that will befall Jesus. The urgency hastens, and hastens.

At the same time Jesus and the disciples need to rest. He wants to take them away to a quiet place to rest awhile. He has always needed time apart to pray, to restore himself. But seemingly there is no time. People need him and their need is urgent. The times are urgent. He can't deny them. And he can't hold back time.

My best friend's husband is dying. Jane thought he would die 18 months ago, but I predicted he'd see another summer. And last winter I said the same, but he won't see the end of this one. Last week he turned his back on the hospital bed that had arrived in their living room. Now he's in it for good.

When I saw Jane the other day she said, "Every morning I walk into the bathroom and say 'I can't do this.'" "But you are doing it," I told her. She can't do it, but she has to. She can't do it, and she will.

The only time Jesus seems to falter is when he asks God to let the cup pass from his lips, if it is God's will. Otherwise he moves like an arrow blazing through Nazareth, his teachings imperative, his healings speedy, his travels swift.

But what about those times when he does manage to withdraw for prayer and rest. Does he find a quiet rooftop where he says 'I can't do this'? I wouldn't be surprised. He *is* human, after all.

We all have moments, don't we, in the midst of some trial we're undergoing, when we say, or think, 'I can't do this.' We are human, after all. And there's no shame— or there shouldn't be—in that momentary faltering. Just remember Jesus, who invites us *to come away and rest for a while*. Who invites us *to lie down in green pastures, and restore our souls*. Alleluia! Amen.