

Mark 6: 30 – 34, 53 – end

**'Rest and Rhythm'**

**Introduction ...**

I want to begin by asking a question.

Over the last 18 months ... how many have found it difficult sometimes to remember which day of the week it was?

Hands up ... *(most of us put up our hands!)*

Yes, I think many of us have found that days and weeks ... even perhaps months ... have somehow blurred into each other ...

In a *New York Times* article a few months ago, a psychologist called Adam Grant identified the “dominant emotion of 2021” as *“languishing.”* He went on to describe this unfortunate state in a variety of ways: a sense of emptiness. Despondency ... A lack of hope ... Aimlessness and joylessness ... The “dulling of delight” and the “dwindling of desire.”

Not only this year – but also in much of last year – 2020 – we’ve tended to lose our previous sense of order and rhythm in our lives, which can lead to disorientation or languishing whatever age we are:

- Children and young people with school and other activities
- Parents – having to home school
- Those in work – having to work from home for some, in danger of losing their job for others
- Those who are retired – no longer being able to do the activities that brought enjoyment or purpose; not able to see family
- For Christians – and indeed for those of other faiths – it has meant a drastically different way of connecting with other disciples and of worship and outward service.

For ourselves or for those amongst your family and friends – you’ll know that for some people, this has looked like the transforming of their homes into makeshift day-care centres, schools, nursing facilities, and professional workspaces all at once – just to meet the multigenerational demands of life under quarantine.

For others, it has meant living 24/7 on Zoom, with no clear lines between the digital and the actually present, the screen and the self. For others, it has meant losing income or work, or facing eviction. For some, they have had to watch loved ones die of Covid, whereas others haven’t been able to be with loved ones as they have died. For many, it has meant feeling cut off – completely or partially from their fellowship of faith.

Not surprising that we may not have been sure of what day of the week it is!

The special service here in 2 weeks’ time will help us to reflect on and process what we and others have been through in the last 18 months – as will the reflection stations available from this Tuesday onwards – set out around the church.

And today's Gospel points to a way forward too. It gives us the portrait of Jesus we may rarely consider ... A Jesus who believes in *rest*. Not that this should come as a surprise ... In the Ten Commandments – the Sabbath principle is loud and clear ...

***“Let’s go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile,”*** he says to his disciples as the crowds throng around them at the edge of the Sea of Galilee. ***“Come away with me,”*** is how another translation put it, there is both wisdom and love in these words. Jesus wants to provide a time of rest and recuperation for his friends. He wants to make sure that their zeal for ministry – for *success* in ministry – doesn't become an idol ... A drug. He wants to make sure that they value *being* more than *doing*.

One of the most insidious social cultural impacts of the Covid pandemic has been its blurring of the boundaries: between home and work, rest and productivity; between one day and another.

No wonder we're languishing. We're not meant to live this way. We're meant to ***“come away”*** ... To honour the rhythms and borders of work and play, inside and outside, online and in-person, sleep and wakefulness. It's not a coincidence that Jesus asks his disciples to leave the noise and crowds behind. Sometimes, we need deep silence. We need to *unplug*.

Fortunately, we follow a Saviour who is unapologetic about his need for rest and solitude. Who sees no shame in retreating when he and his disciples need a break. Who does so *even when* the needs around him continue to press in on all sides.

Jesus is able to do this because he trusts God enough to let go. Even as he honours his vocation, and keeps his commitments, he doesn't hoard the limelight, or allow his disciples to imagine that their faith makes them invincible.

In the end, the work of the kingdom is God's. We are precious and beloved, yes. But we're not indispensable. God will survive our naps. It is more than ok to rest.

Ask God to show you over the next few weeks how to re-enter life-giving rhythms.

***(Adapted from Debie Thomas: <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay>)***