

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle B, 7.18.21

Jeremiah 23:1-6/Ephesians 2:13-18/

Mark 6:30-34

NO GUILT OVER NAP TIME

Just as it was starting to feel like we're getting a new lease on life, with the relief we're feeling by receiving the vaccine and the carefree days of summer and the chance to be outdoors and unmasked, the news turns sour again giving us cause for concern. The New York Yankees postponed their game against the Red Sox this week because three of their pitchers, all healthy young men, all fully vaccinated, tested positive for the Coronavirus. There still are the lingering feelings for lots of us after these many months of struggle and lethargy and disruption – the emotional long-haul of the pandemic. Writers and thinkers, counselors and caregivers are looking for ways to describe and express those feelings. I found one that resonated with me and may provide you with insight and perhaps better ways of coping with the pandemic feelings that resist being named and contained.



A recent article in the New York Times was entitled: "There's a Name for the Blah You're Feeling: It's Called Languishing." Not a commonly used word, "**languishing**" is a pretty good description for that state between flourishing, which is the peak of well-being, and depression, which is the

valley of ill-being. Languishing is an in-between state. The author stated that someone who is languishing doesn't have symptoms of mental illness, but isn't exactly the picture of mental health either. *You're not functioning at full capacity. Languishing dulls your motivation, disrupts your ability to focus...* What may have been frightening when the pandemic began, over time as it dragged on, gave way to a chronic condition of languishing. It's a sense of being joyless and aimless, losing one's balance and rhythm, muddling through your days and looking at life through a foggy windshield. I recognized that condition within myself many times these past months.

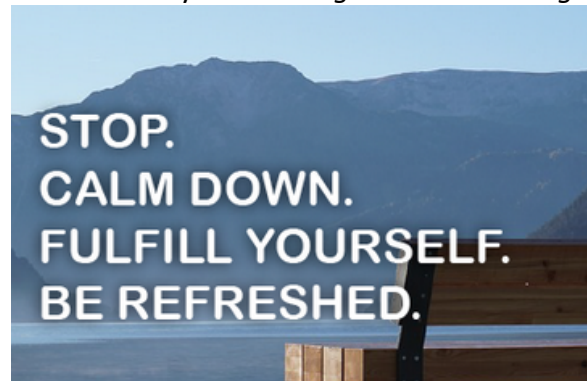
So we should be especially grateful for the Gospel this week, because it offers us a way out. A way out of our malaise, a way out of our inefficient striving, a way out of our culture's soul-draining workaholicism. Specifically, it offers us a portrait of Jesus we rarely consider. A Jesus who believes in *rest*. Too often we envision Jesus to be a brisk and efficient Messiah — full of purpose but short on time — striding from village to synagogue to hilltop to seaside, a whirlwind of miracles, parables, and life-changing conversations swirling around him. We may regard Jesus as a sleepless zealot, striving to save the world before his clock runs down. But a high-strung workaholic is not who emerges in our Gospel reading this week. Instead, we find a Jesus who recognizes, honors, and tends to his own tiredness. We encounter a teacher who pulls his overheated disciples away from their labor and striving. We discover a savior who probes below the surfaces of our busyness, and pinpoints the hunger our manic culture won't allow us to name: the hunger for space, reflection, solitude, nourishment, recreation, rest, and sleep.

Our Gospel reading comes right before the passage about Jesus's feeding of the five thousand. Today we hear about the return of the disciples from their first ministry tour — their inauguration into apostleship. We see them on fire, bursting with thrilling stories of the healings, exorcisms, and effective preaching campaigns they've pulled off on their own for the first time. They're wired. Excited. Caffeinated. *Ready*. In their minds, what they need is their next project from Jesus. Their next divine mission. In their minds, the crowds are waiting, and it's time to *go*.



But Jesus disagrees. Where the disciples see energy, Jesus sees overstimulation. Where the disciples see a tightly packed schedule, Jesus sees a poor sense of balance and rhythm. Where the disciples see invincibility, Jesus sees *need*. The need to debrief and reflect. The need to eat, pray, play, and sleep. The need to learn the art of solitude. Maybe Jesus senses that the disciples have darker stories to share with him, too — stories that will take time and tenderness to unearth. Stories of failure and rejection. Stories of doubt. Hard stories they need to process privately with their teacher. Whatever the case, Jesus recognizes that the disciples need a break. They're wired, tired, underfed, and in significant need of rest.

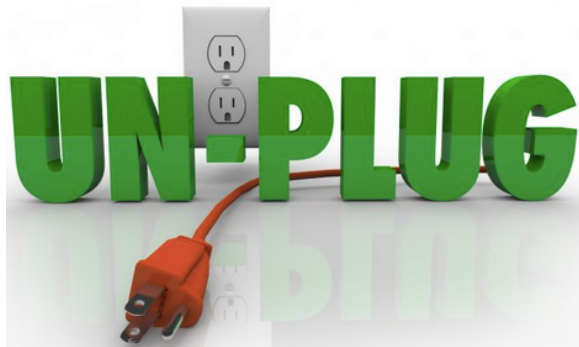
"Let's go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile," he says to his disciples as the crowds throng around them at the edge of the Sea of Galilee. "*Come away with me*," is how another translation puts it. There's both wisdom and love in these words. Jesus wants to provide a time of rest and 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*.



Today's Gospel offers us an essential glimpse of Jesus's human life. His need to withdraw, his desire for solitary prayer, his physical hunger, his sleepiness, his inclination to hide. These glimpses take nothing away from Jesus's divinity; they enhance it, making it richer and all the more mysterious. They remind us that the doctrine of the Incarnation really is Christianity's best gift to the world. God — the God of the whole universe — hungers, sleeps, eats, rests, withdraws, and grieves. In all of these mundane but crucial ways, our God is like us. Our God rests.

One of the most unfortunate social and cultural impacts of the Covid pandemic has been its blurring of the boundaries between home and work, rest and productivity. Some people have had to transform their homes into makeshift daycares, 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 analog, the screen and the self. No wonder we're languishing. We're not meant to live this way. We're meant to "come away." To honor 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 Savior who is unapologetic about his need for rest and solitude. Jesus sees no shame in retreating when he and his disciples need a break. Even when the needs around him continue to press in on all sides, Jesus is able to trust God enough to let go. Even as he honors 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's more than okay to rest. I love the story about Pope John XXIII and the words he added to his nighttime prayer: *It's your Church, Lord. I'm going to bed.* I bet that approach helped him to get a good night's rest and to wake refreshed the next morning, ready to face a new day. It's an

attitude that can do the same for you and me.



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