

Come, All Who are Weary

Mark 1:14-20

Whitefish UMC

January 22, 2012

✦ A man sobering up from the night before is sitting through the Sunday sermon, finding it long and boring. Still feeling hung over and tired, he finally nods off.

The pastor has been watching him all along, noticing his apparent hangover and is disgusted. At the end of the sermon, the preacher decides to make an example of him.

He says to his congregation, "All those wishing to have a place in heaven, please stand."

The whole room stands up except, of course, the sleeping man.

Then the preacher says even more loudly, "And he who would like to find a place in hell please STAND UP!"

The weary man catching only the last part groggily stands up, only to find that he's the only one standing.

Confused and embarrassed he says, "I don't know what we're voting on here, Pastor, but it sure seems like you and me are the only ones standing for it!"

- ✦ I used to get upset when I would look out into the congregation and a couple of you were dozing off. Then I would remember the days when I was a younger working mom, putting in long and stressful hours every week. Sometimes the only time I got to rest and “let down” was in church, and I would fight to keep awake, even though I loved the preaching and the worship.
- ✦ Last week we spoke about what keeps us awake at night, remembering God’s call to Samuel in the middle of the night. In the middle of the week, I got to go on a short retreat with two Episcopalian clergywomen. I expected to rest, read, renew my commitment to you and to my ministry. I expected to sleep well.
- ✦ But instead I slept like a baby. You know what that means—you wake up every couple of hours cranky and fussy and distressed. Why? My clergy sisters had the same problem with sleep. There was nothing wrong with the beds or the temperature. We hadn’t had too much coffee.
- ✦ So what was going on?
- ✦ Does Jesus care about people who can’t sleep at night? Yes, I think he does. But sometimes it’s necessary to toss and turn when the waters of our lives are stirred up. And sometimes it is God, through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, that’s “gonna trouble the waters.”
- ✦ In today’s gospel, that’s just what happens.
- ✦ Jesus passes along the Galilean lake and spots a couple of fishermen, Simon Peter and Andrew, casting a net into the sea. Jesus says to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people,” and immediately they drop their nets and follow him. Moving a little farther down the shore, Jesus spots another pair of brothers, James and

John, and calls to them as well. They, too, leave their work and follow Jesus.

- ✦ Don't you wonder what would have made these first disciples break with everything and immediately follow Jesus? Perhaps they craved new meaning and direction and purpose in life. These fishermen on the surface were doing fairly well. They were not exactly poor—they had enough to own houses and employ hired hands to help them. They are established members of local society, doing quite well by the standards of the day, making an important contribution to the welfare of their extended families by being part of the fishing industry. But still they drop their nets and follow when Jesus calls.
- ✦ Somehow they sense that the call of Jesus comes from God. They know that if they don't respond to this invitation, they won't be able to sleep at night.
- ✦ How about us? How is God calling us to follow on a new path, a path of deeper meaning and purpose? Last week we talked about hearing the voice of God amidst all the competing voices for our attention. Is God trying to speak to us in the night, as God did to Samuel, to get our attention? Is that what's keeping us awake, tossing and turning?
- ✦ Perhaps our restless souls have yet to find, as Augustine says, our rest, until we rest in God. Is the key to serene slumber always going to be a day in the company of the Master, following in the way of discipleship?
- ✦ Of course that involves taking time to figure out just what it is that Jesus calls us to do. Maybe it means changing jobs, responding to a call to be a Big Brother or Big Sister, delivering meals on wheels once a week, jumping in Whitefish Lake for the Penguin Plunge, forgiving

- a long-held grudge, taking on a new role of leadership in our church, teaching Sunday school, helping with our youth, ...the list goes on and on. It may mean changing old patterns of behavior, entering into a new relationship, or leaving a destructive one.
- ✦ When Jesus says, “Follow me,” the paths can take many forms. The best road for one person is not the right route for another.
 - ✦ So how can you figure out which way to go? According to Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, **the process of discernment always aims at enhancing your participation in the work of God. And it is always performed for the glory of God and the healing of the world.**
 - ✦ It’s true that most of us can’t go off on a month-long retreat to discern God’s call on our lives, but we can do the work of discernment, seeking the mind of God on who we are to be in 2012.
 - ✦ Discerning the will of God, or the call of Jesus to “follow me,” involves at least two things: one, a sense of individual call, and second, the affirmation of the body of Christ concerning your call. Sensing the call involves reflection, prayer, and paying attention to feelings of “consolation” and “desolation.” Feelings that are either harmonious with the Spirit of God or out of tune with the Spirit of God.
 - ✦ We need a passionate commitment to follow God, and a deepening sensitivity to the ways of God. It will lead to a discovery of the right direction for our lives and a deeply peaceful feeling that we have done the best we can to follow the way of Jesus.
 - ✦ And we can begin right here and right now. It may not be easy and it may take awhile. As we discern who Jesus is calling us to be in 2012,

we will try to become aware of the many dimensions of what lies before us. We'll look at many alternatives, positive and negative, and bring these options to God in prayer. Pay attention to your feelings—feelings of *consolation* that give rise to life, love, and peace, joy, creativity, communion. And of course pay attention to feelings of *desolation*, emotions that give birth to despair, confusion, alienation, destructiveness and discord.

- ✦ Sometimes the things that trouble you the most are the ministries for change to which God calls you. Does it bother you that children in our community go hungry on the weekends and during school breaks? Then God may call you to help provide a ministry of care to those hungry kids....
- ✦ You will rely on both your head and heart to lead you, lead you to the choice that gives you the deepest feelings of consolation. And this will most likely be the choice you should act on, the choice that brings you closer to the kingdom of God.
- ✦ Discipleship offers us a way to be with Jesus in all we say and do. Albert Schweitzer wrote words about this moment of discipleship:
 - ✦ “He comes to us as one unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside; he speaks to us the same word: “follow me!” and sets us to the tasks which he has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey him, he will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which we shall pass through in his fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, we shall learn in our own experience who he is.”(*The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p. 40)
- ✦ Ultimately discipleship is about staying in the path of our beliefs, the path where Jesus beckons us to drop what preoccupies us in the

moment, rise up, and follow him with all that we are. It's about allowing yourself to be reshaped—and forever changed—by your relationship to God.

- ✦ Remember the movie about the author Virginia Woolf and successive women struggling with their identities and the right path to follow? The film is called *The Hours*, and it stars Meryl Streep, Nicole Kidman, and Julianne Moore. It won all kinds of awards.
- ✦ Virginia Woolf was a troubled woman, gifted and haunted at the same time. She wrote this about momentary glimpses that we are given of how to follow Jesus: *A steel ring of clear poetry. It is in these moments that we shall connect the gulls and the women with bad teeth, the church spire and the bobbing billycock hats. In is in these moments, when things come together for us, when various pieces of our lives begin to fit a pattern, that we see, we change. These moments of seeing and transformation Christians learn to name as conversion.*
- ✦ That is what we seek. Moments of seeing and transformation. And when we receive them, we need to act. To be like the first followers of Jesus and make a decision to walk in God's way. There was simply no hesitation among those first fishermen when they received Christ's invitation. "Immediately," Mark reports, they left their nets and followed him.
- ✦ And in the end, their radical decision to head in a new direction did not destroy their family relationships, as some might have feared. Simon Peter's family home ended up becoming a center from which Jesus and his followers performed their ministry. They stepped out in faith, and God blessed their boldness.

- ✦ Will the same be true for us? I know it's not easy. I know it only too well. There are nights when anxiety and worry keep me awake. I long for rest, just like you. But what I am learning is that when I put my full trust in the One who says "Follow me," I sleep like a child nestled in her mother's comforting embrace—just like the Psalmist in the 131st Psalm, who says *"But I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.*

O Israel, hope in the LORD

from this time on and for evermore."
- ✦ Jesus says to us, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."
- ✦ Eugene Peterson, in the Message, offers us this reading of that beloved passage: "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me, and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."
- ✦ A good night's sleep often follows a day of walking and working. There's nothing better than a good workout to guarantee serene slumber.
- ✦ And if you walk and work with Jesus, then you have the added benefit of feeling that your energy has been exerted on the right path, toward deeper meaning and purpose in life.

- ✦ May you learn the unforced rhythms of grace and live freely and lightly as you answer the call of Jesus to “follow me.”
- ✦ And sleep well—even if it’s during the sermon.
- ✦ Amen.

Sources:

Alice Trowbridge, “The Kingdom Revealed,” <http://www.fourthchurch.org>