

The Other Side of Jesus – Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56
Sermon prepared and preached by Rev. Don Hammond
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In the late 1970's there was a man who was a member of the congregation in which I was the pastor. At that time he was in his late 80's, and he had lost his wife a number of years prior to my being there. When I would visit with him in his house, he would be overjoyed for the visit. He told me his story. His parents immigrated to the United States from Germany and they farmed in northern Idaho. He delighted in talking about his family and life. During one visit I noticed a photo on his wall. It was a photo of about 20 young people on a farm wagon being pulled by horses. They were all smiling and laughing, clearly having an enjoyable time. When I asked him about the photo he pointed to himself and his wife on the wagon then followed with these haunting words "I am the only one of those people left." I did a lot of listening to him as he told his stories of his work and of his hobby. Yes, he had a hobby, and it was obvious everywhere in his house. He would burn words of wisdom on pieces of wood, then tastefully frame them and place them somewhere on a wall in his house.

He told me that he had lived a good life and that he enjoyed it, but concluded with "pastor, I am ready to go." At the conclusion of one of my visits, he asked me to select any one of his many pieces of work and take it. I looked carefully and my eyes fell upon one that I thought reflected our friendship and visits. It read:

*"Listen, you will not only learn something,
But you will also be popular."*

I still have that framed piece of wood, and it reminds me not only of him, but also what I began to learn from him – good listening is valuable!

I think we preachers might make an awful mistake by missing that quality in Jesus. I am as guilty as anyone by dominating my sermons and writings with thoughts and illustration about the many words and deeds of Jesus. Jesus was a preacher and a teacher, and most of the gospels are dominated by what Jesus said and what he did. However, in today's reading we are exposed to *The Other Side of Jesus*. Yes, Jesus did have another side, a side of him that was not of words or deeds. It was his listening.

Prior to what we heard in today's Gospel reading, Jesus sent his twelve disciples into the countryside and gave them the authority and power to do everything he could do. They could teach, preach, heal, and forgive. Try to imagine what you would do if that were given to you. Like anyone, the disciples were likely enamored with their newfound powers. I suspect they went 24/7 curing diseases and illnesses. If they were not healing, they were telling stories, and explaining the things they heard from Jesus. It is unclear how long they were gone – a week, two weeks, two months, who knows? But we do know that when they rejoined Jesus they were exhausted. Try to imagine what Jesus saw.

-Imagine that you spent the last two weeks at a continuous tailgate party at the Bowl Championship game where an undefeated University of Nebraska football team would be playing another undefeated football team for the national championship. Game time arrived, you are in the stadium and it was them 7, Nebraska 3, and then in the last seconds of play, a 99 yard touchdown run wins the game for Nebraska and of course that is followed by hysteria and celebration parties for a full year, as can and would happen in Nebraska. You would be exhausted! How could you possibly be ready for the first game of the new season?

When the 12 disciples returned, their excitement was at a fever pitch, but they were exhausted. Jesus paid attention to their exhaustion, and listened to their reports, and then told them something that happens other times in the Gospels but is easy to overlook: it is time to be alone. He told them it is time to “go off to a lonely place and rest.”

In both football and the military, players and recruits have been drilled to go beyond exhaustion, to push harder and farther, and go beyond the boundaries of endurance. Of course, there have been a number of deaths because of that practice, and both the military and football coaches are now acknowledging that such a push is fruitless and dangerous, and now understand that timely rests are priceless. Keen attention must be given to take rest at the right time.

Jesus understood this with his disciples. Perhaps one of the most maligned stories of Jesus was when a woman entered Simon's house in Bethany (Matt. 26:6), and poured expensive oil on Jesus' head. The disciples railed, declaring that poor people could have used that money better. Jesus then said words that many folks are confused by. He said “the poor are with you always.” The work of the Church is now and forever. Needs that

we work endlessly upon will not disappear. We will need to feed the hungry, free the oppressed, heal the sick, and bring hope to the downtrodden for as long as the Church and we live. Jesus, however, understood the need to rest and replenish, so that we might be able to continue his work effectively. It is part of our work to listen to each other, the church and ourselves. Listen for those moments when it is time to go off *“to some lonely place where you can rest quietly.”*

Being an interim pastor can be a delicate responsibility. I firmly believe that the time between pastors is a golden window of opportunity. It is a time to get things done that are far more difficult to accomplish when a “called” pastor is in place. For the most part, I have found there is less resistance to tackling such challenges during the interim time. By my own nature, I am inclined to push, push, push. But there is another side to interim work. I have discovered that sometimes my pushing is in conflict with the needs of the people. Sometimes I encounter congregations that are filled with people who are also push, push, and push folks. When I encounter that, then my responsibility is to be an observant listener, and to somehow say the words of Jesus, *“Come with me to some lonely place where you can rest quietly.”*

Busyness can be a terrible distraction from seeing the larger picture. “Busyness” is often the operative mode for worship in many congregations. Such as, “let there not be an empty moment in worship.” Every moment must be filled with words, movement, or song. Worship can be an opportunity, too, for restful and rejuvenating listening.

While I was a seminary student I served a Friends (Quaker) congregation as a student pastor for one year. It was there that I learned the power and effectiveness of silence and being still. In worship there were lengthy periods of silence, as the entire congregation sat with each other in prayer, knowing the Spirit of God was among them. In silent prayer what is happening is not only silent talking, but also silent listening. Listening for the Spirit and response of God for the conditions of that time and place. Being faithful is also to listen and receive the care that others and God offer.

I know a man in another part of this country who is an architect. He designs the remodeling of houses. Recently he shared with me a notebook of photographs of his work, and his work is spectacular. What is most interesting is his own house. Over the years he has been so busy designing other people’s houses that his house was

experiencing neglect. “I will get to it,” he would declare, but other jobs always took priority.

Jesus made it clear to his disciples that much would be expected of them, but they must also be cared for, and not neglect their need for rest and the opportunity to listen for the Spirit of God. Their work would be his work, and it would be significant and endless. But on the day of their return from doing great works, Jesus says to them: “*Come with me, by yourselves, to some lonely place where you can rest quietly.*” Be certain you capture that in the living of your own life. Be certain to capture that in the living of the church. Be certain to remember that there is a time to be in “*some lonely place where you can rest quietly.*” Our offerings will be greater when we listen to those words and care for ourselves the way Jesus cared for his disciples. Embracing *The Other Side of Jesus* is good for our physical and spiritual health. Even our work will be stronger and more effective when we embrace *The Other Side of Jesus*.

Amen.