

Jeremiah 23:1-6  
Psalm 23  
Ephesians 2:11-22  
Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

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### **Be Still and Know**

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to thee, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

“Silence is the womb of true speech” are words I’ve never forgotten since I first heard them years ago at a Good Friday meditation. “Be still and know that I am God” from Psalm 46 conveys a similar message which is at the heart of Mark’s Gospel this morning. Be still. Come away to a deserted place. Rest.

We fail at this over and over again, and yet, it is the key that turns the lock on transformation. Be still. Know.

Who among you hasn’t said at 3:30 or 4:00 o’clock in the afternoon “I’ve been so busy I haven’t had a moment to eat?” A few dozen verses earlier in the sixth chapter of Mark, we hear how Jesus began sending out his disciples two by two, giving them authority over the unclean spirits. The disciples had been so busy healing, curing, and anointing people for the first time in their lives that they had “no leisure even to eat.” There was so much to tell! Jesus knew they all needed to take a break. Stop. Rest. Eat.

And so did he. He was in the throes of grief and whatever despondency was pummeling him in the immediate aftermath of the beheading of his friend and mentor, John the Baptist.

He knew he needed what his disciples did. Silence. A silence where God could speak, a silence where his unbearable grief could be contained. The clamoring crowds kept coming as clamoring crowds always will. But Jesus stopped searching for a silent pause.

Silence is oxygen for our souls. Had I not been quiet would the words “Center your heart on the feast of Jesus” ever come to me as they did in the quiet of one early morning? I could easily have been listening to a book on Audible, working out, or “just” checking emails.

Silence makes us all uneasy and anxious because we sacrifice it at the altar of our relentlessly busy lives. In that regard, very little has changed in 2,000 years although Jesus wasn't on "Insta" nor was he making "To Do" lists on parchment or papyrus. The demands and distractions of this world show no mercy.

We profess our desire to know God, draw closer to Christ and yet, how do we make that happen?

The sabbath. For too many of us it means not working. Doing something different, but still *doing* which is so much more than the invitation to "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." Nailing it, as she so often does, is Lutheran pastor Nadia Bolz Weber:

If God is going to insist that I lie down in green pastures, that's fine...you know, as long as the pasture has Wi-Fi – or at least 3g coverage... I myself have only 2 speeds: go and stop. But when I stop it's not like I'm resting, I'm just collapsing because I can't go anymore. And I don't think that's what sacred rest means.<sup>1</sup>

Sacred rest. The sabbath. A new way of thinking about it for me from the late Rabbi Abraham Heschel who wrote:

Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul. The world has our hands, but our soul belongs to Someone Else.<sup>2</sup>

In the introduction to her father's book on the Sabbath, Susannah Heschel describes it as a place apart from the demands of the world. On the Sabbath when she was growing up in New York in the late 50s and sixties, there was no talk of the Holocaust. (Her father had fled Germany in 1940.) There was no talk of the Vietnam war nor any other divisive issues in the world or family. Like the clamoring crowds in our scripture today they would still be there when the sun set on Saturday night. She described the first six days of the week as "a pilgrimage to the Sabbath."<sup>3</sup> Her father believed the Sabbath was a way to "survive" civilization, not escape from it.

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<sup>1</sup> Weber, Nadia Bolz, "No Time to Rest and also no Jetpacks," July 20th, 2015

<sup>2</sup> Heschel, Rabbi Abraham Joseph, *The Sabbath, It's Meaning for Modern Man*, Farrar, Straus, Giroux Classics, 2005

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Earlier in Mark, Jesus reminds the Pharisees that “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath.”<sup>4</sup> It is grace, given to us not as a reward but a gift.

Perhaps the soul-tending at the heart of the Sabbath is one way to answer the question many of us are asking in these tumultuous times when it too often feels like the gravity is gone in our world. “What can I do?”

There is, of course, plenty to do that is important to do. Finding the Sabbath in ourselves and in our lives is in no way an escape hatch, but perhaps the gateway to a deeper understanding of what should come.

There is a synchronicity in our texts this morning. The prophet Jeremiah shows us the anger of the Lord at the shepherds who destroyed and scattered his sheep. The Lord promises to bring them the wayward sheep back and provide a just and righteous leader for them.

Psalms 23 invokes not only the good shepherd who will lead us through the valley of the shadow of death but prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies.

And Paul’s letter to the Ephesians describes how we’re all united in the life-giving blood of Jesus who can tear down the walls dividing us from each other and uniting us in one kingdom. He points to Christ as the cornerstone in the foundation of the kingdom we will all build together.

The readings all point in one way or another to God’s promise of a shepherd to lead and protect us in peace and unity as we strive to realize God’s kingdom here on earth.

But what happens when surviving an attempted assassin’s bullet fired at a Presidential candidate is seen as “proof” that God has anointed a “savior” many on the other side of our divided country see as evil?

And what happens when his political opponent, a man of deep faith says only “a sign from the Lord Almighty” will make him leave over half to two thirds of the voters in his own party and many of its leaders believe he cannot win?

We are staring through a glass darkly. Fear and anxiety hovers over many of us like a toxic cloud.

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<sup>4</sup> Mark 2: 47

Maybe pausing long enough to braid a few loaves of Challah isn't such a bad idea especially if we remember that while the world may hold our hands, our souls belong to someone else.

AMEN