

“Caregivers Need Care, Too”

Mark 6:7-13; 30-34; 53-56

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The disciples could hardly wait to see Jesus. They were eager to tell him about the success they had on their first mission trip without him.

Hours earlier, Jesus sent the twelve disciples out in pairs to teach, preach and heal those who were sick. On numerous occasions, they watched as Jesus listened to people’s stories and responded with empathy and compassion. Now it was their turn to follow his example.

I am sure they were anxious as they headed out without Jesus. Would they be successful? Would they say and do the right things? Would they have the ability to help desperate people or just frustrate them more by offering false hope?

They returned to Jesus with big smiles and amazing stories. I get a sense they were all talking at the same time while they compared notes and shared their experiences.

Actually, they did such a good job they did not return alone. A large crowd of people followed them seeking more of their time and attention.

Of course, I believe Jesus was pleased with their success, but I also think he was concerned about the disciples’ welfare. He knew they were hungry and exhausted, so he instructed them to get into a boat and go with him to a secluded place for rest.

When the people saw Jesus and the disciples pulling away from the shore of the Sea of Galilee, they followed on foot. The crowd was waiting for Jesus and the disciples when they landed the boat, seeking hope and help for their problems.

Instead of ignoring them, Jesus had compassion on them and began teaching. Before sending them home at the end of the day, the Lord fed them using the fish and loaves a little boy shared with him.

According to Mark, the next day unfolded much like the previous one. People traveled great distances with their sick relatives to find Jesus and the disciples, hoping for a few minutes of their time so they could be healed.

You know what intrigues me about this story? It is the fact Jesus not only had compassion upon the masses but also his disciples. He was as concerned about the needs of the caregivers as he was those who desperately looked to them for help.

Who do you know that needs rest because they have grown weary helping others? You see the toll it is taking upon them and are concerned about them.

In church, we tend to spend more time focusing upon the people needing help with chronic, overwhelming problems than we do those who reach out to them. I understand why we do this. When Jesus invited us to follow him, he called us to a life of sacrifice and service.

The gospel compels us to give ourselves away. "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." (Matthew 16:24-25)

Compassion and generosity are pillars of our faith. Sharing a listening ear, words of encouragement, financial resources and life-giving hope builds healthy communities. Truly, we are our brother's keeper.

At the same time, caregivers have needs, too. Internal batteries can run low or be completely drained if we don't periodically lay aside our responsibilities and rest.

There is a tendency on the part of caregivers to neglect their own needs. This is true for parents, children of aging parents, those who take care of sick relatives and those in helping professions like social workers, counselors, ministers, teachers, doctors and nurses.

Why are caregivers so vulnerable? The needs of others can be overwhelming, and most caregivers feel guilty if they take any time for themselves.

Our text challenges us, however, to think and act differently. If Jesus and his disciples needed to carve out time to replenish their strength, how much more do we?

Recently, I boarded an airplane and listened to the flight attendant explain how to fasten a seat belt and put on an oxygen mask. If you have flown in the last forty years, you know what she said as she picked up the yellow face mask.

“Place the mask on yourself first and then help the children around you.”

Why do flight attendants always say this? You cannot offer help very long if you are deprived of oxygen. You will either faint or die, leaving your children vulnerable.

I know this is easier said than done. When you have people pulling and tugging you in many directions, it is hard to think about your own needs.

Perhaps the Psalmist had this in mind when he uttered those words, “He **makes** me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.” (Psalm 23:2-3a)

Have you ever wondered why David said God ‘makes’ us lie down in green pastures? If you are a caregiver who feels guilty taking time to address your own needs, you know.

We need to hear the words of Methodist minister, theologian and professor, William Willimon, this morning.

“We stress other commands of Jesus to love the poor, feed the hungry, bind up one another’s wounds and bear one another’s burdens. Why not equally stress this command of Jesus to rest?

Willimon continues, “In my experience, it is the sincere, dedicated, earnest disciples who are the worst about taking care of themselves. They don’t mean to, I’m sure, but in their ‘busyness’ and ceaseless activity, they give the impression it is up to them to do good, or it won’t get done. It is up to them to fix the world, or it won’t get fixed. It is up to them to meet all needs, or they won’t be met.

Behind our 'busyness' is the blasphemous belief that we are saviors of the world. Well, we are not God, and we do not run the world."

This hits every caregiver between the eyes, doesn't it? We find it hard to believe God can work without us and are confident others cannot live without our constant attention. This is why caregivers must be on guard against adopting a 'Messiah Complex'.

Do you know which of the Ten Commandments is the longest? Surely, it is the one about honoring God or parents. Maybe it is the one about honesty or adultery. It is none of these.

Instead, it is the one about honoring the Sabbath, the need to rest. It is the most detailed and specific of all the Commandments.

We are not *Energizer Bunnies*. Our batteries run down and need recharging. Our spirits have to be replenished. To deny or ignore this need within us is deadly.

Philip Melanchthon, a 16th century German and influential leader in the Protestant Reformation, once said to Martin Luther, "This day, you and I will discuss the governance of the universe."

Luther unexpectedly responded, "This day, you and I will go fishing and leave the governance of the universe to God."

Village workers were hired to carry heavy equipment on their backs to an outpost. After days of difficult travel, the workers refused to pick up their packs and go any further. They sat beside the trail ignoring shouts of the leader of the expedition to get up and move forward.

Finally, the leader asked why they were unwilling to continue. One of the workers replied, "Sir, we are waiting for our souls to catch up with our bodies."

Is it time for you to do this?