

Mark 6:30-56 (selected verses – 6:30-39, 45-51)
When God Interrupts: Restlessness
December 6, 2020 (Advent II)
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Title Slide

This morning's message derives from Mark 6:30-56 – while I will only read selected sections to begin – the whole of today's message is grounded in Mark 6 – let's lean in and listen attentively to God's word for us this day...

Scripture Slides – Mark 6:30-39; 45-51

Title Slide

Let us Pray:

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.
Come as the fire and burn,
Come as the wind and cleanse,
Come as the light and reveal,
Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:
That the words of my mouth
And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you,
for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

Sermon

I've been thinking about Advent lately –

[slide – Advent Candles]

this time in the church's year when we wait and watch for God's light to be born into the world's darkness.

I've been thinking about Advent 2020 – awaiting birth in the year we'd all like to rewind & do over...

How do we celebrate amid loss (jobs, vacations, graduations, loved ones)?

That first Christmas God broke through darkness in unquenchable light - and yet - fulfillment entered unfulfilling times...

(born into the muck of a stable stall)...

the light later extinguished (cross) before coming back with greater brilliance
(resurrection & ascension)...

All this is to say:

it's okay if Advent & Christmas doesn't sparkle with Hallmark beauty & brightness;
it's okay if joy (or hope, peace love to name all four of Advent's candles) lives next door to angst;
it's okay if 'Merry Christmas' is more question than certainty.

For:

it is into dissonance God chose to dwell;
it is into humanity God chose to identify & be identified;
it is into distraction God chose perseverance;

It is into what can feel at times like a lost, lonely, listless existence God chose to speak hope/peace/joy/love.

[title slide]

Advent 2020 may not feel like brilliant celebration - and yet - it still holds onto persistent hope, and peace, and joy, and love because when God's radiant light descended and ascended there was a promise, "I am with you always."

May it still be so!

The good news of the gospel is that we're not alone in wondering where this God in the flesh is and what this Jesus is up to – recall this morning's text – the disciples –

[slide - disciples]

They've seen Jesus do a few remarkable & miraculous things:
He's fed a whole bunch of people with 5 loaves of bread and two fish...
He walked on water...
And they still didn't get what he was all about...

The even better news is that whether they – or we for that matter – get it – Jesus is still at work & calling us into the work at hand...

Jesus didn't wait for their understanding – to lead the way.

The whole thing starts after the disciples returned from their missionary journeys.
Jesus had sent them out in pairs to proclaim the good news.

When they returned – Jesus knew how tiring such ministry could be – Jesus understands that when moved by the things which move God's heart – it can be fatigue inducing – that's when

we see care-giver – or – compassion fatigue – set in – one cares for the needs of others to the point they can lose themselves and be overrun with the emotion and burden of it all...

When one consumes the suffering of those for whom they are called to care – it can become like a dark cloud that hangs over one’s head, goes wherever they go & consumes their thoughts – often at unplanned times and in unplanned ways.

One can become so saturated – it feels like they are incessantly treading water & just barely keeping their head above the surface until fatigued muscles give out and before they know it they’re slowly losing buoyancy. Left unchecked – compassion fatigue leads to burn out.

[Slide – frontline workers]

One thinks right now of front-line workers & health care professionals – self-care needs to be part of their daily routine – we pray for & practice safe living that they may find time for such self-care.

[title slide]

Jesus knew this. Whenever he finished a missionary journey or miracle making event – in fact before he began his ministry – he knew the importance of getting alone / getting away / being with God for renewal & inspiration – often we see Jesus in “deserted places” to rest.

The disciples return and tell Jesus all they had done and taught on their Good News Proclaiming journeys. Jesus knew they must be tired, so he says upon their return, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.”

And so, they go away.

But some folks spot them leaving and by the time they get to where they are going a crowd has gathered.

[slide – crowd]

As they go ashore, Jesus sees the great crowd and has compassion on them – because they were like sheep without a shepherd – and he begins teaching them many things.

The disciples thought they were getting away to rest – after all that’s what Jesus implored of them – and now this interruption – Jesus engages with the crowd because he had compassion on them. He knew there was a need and he engaged to meet the need.

Sometimes plans get set aside to be part of what is unfolding before disciples.

I’m guessing the disciples are wondering what in the world is Jesus doing.

*Didn't he just say 'get away' & now we're auditing another seminary class?
I can see them smirking as one of them says, "Welcome to Jesus' TED Talk."*

So, what exactly is going on here?
Why the interruption in this section of Mark 6?

It is, first, literary comparison evoking for the reader several collective shepherding stories:

- Moses – in Numbers 27 – prays the people will have a leader so as not to be like “sheep without a shepherd”
- Prophets – in 1 Kings 22 – condemn kings for failing to act as shepherds
- Ezekiel – in Ezekiel 34 – promises a new age in which God will shepherd the people

Jesus' seeing the people's plight & his response to teach is the presentation of him as their shepherd.

Some interpret the crowd sitting on “green grass” as a reenacting by Jesus of the great shepherding imagery of Psalm 23:2.

[slide – Psalm 23:2 – little lamb]

“He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.”
We could hashtag this image cuteness-overload...”

[title slide]

Jesus' feeding miracle enhances this shepherd imagery, which suffice to say, also holds evocative Old Testament memories for Mark's readers:

- Moses – Exodus 18 – arranges the people in groups under their leaders
- Elisha – 2 Kings 4 – speaks of a similar feeding miracle whereby servants protest the giving of barley loaves to the people
- It also evokes images of the Israelites eating in the wilderness.

The early church saw this as anticipation of the eucharist – Lord's Supper –

- for in this feeding story Jesus takes the role of host giving a banquet for his guests
- Jesus' gestures of blessing before giving bread to disciples recalls the eucharistic blessing found later in Mark 14

Primarily, this feeding miracle demonstrates that the people now have a true shepherd in Jesus.

Sometimes it is good when plans are set aside to be part of what is unfolding before disciples.

Afterwards, it is time to get away with God to renew.

Thus, Jesus, the text tells us, “immediately made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side.”

After saying, 'farewell' – Jesus dismisses the crowd & goes up on the mountain to pray –

I'm guessing Jesus knows – as news travels about what's just transpired – it will be getting even busier and more pressing from here on out – if he is to be fully present & available to the needs around him, then he will need to practice self-care in the hopes of fending off compassion fatigue...

It's the flight attendant's caution:

[slide – oxygen masks]

"Put your oxygen mask on before helping others."

What happens next is important – especially during our Advent 2020 time...

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"When evening came, the boat was out to sea, and he was alone on the land. When [Jesus] saw they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind,

[slide – Jesus walking on water toward boat]

he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea...

...He intended to pass them by. But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded..."

What's interesting to me & for Advent – is the Jesus' intending to "pass them by" reference – it recalls God and Moses' interaction in Exodus 33 -

[slide – Moses alone in rock cleft]

You will recall that Moses has one of the most intimate conversations between a human being and God recorded in the Scriptures

- Moses wonders at this point in Exodus' story – will God stay with the people if they continue chasing golden calves
- As was noted last week, Moses wonders if he will have the capacity to lead
- Ultimately, Moses wants to know – will the Almighty be with the people for the long-haul

The Lord reassures Moses, saying, "I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name."

Then Moses asks of God, "Show me your glory, I pray."

[slide – Moses alone with Exodus 33:19]

God replies, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, "The Lord"; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."

"But," God said, "you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live."

[slide - Moses alone with Exodus 33:19 & Exodus 33:22]

And the Lord continued, See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen."

Moses wants to know of God "will you go with us on this journey?"

[slide - Moses alone in rock cleft – circle image]

This interaction between God and Moses during the Exodus - It's not only a physical journey – it is a spiritual trek as well – while they meander through the wilderness, they are learning about themselves and they are learning about God.

In their wilderness they learn to call God by new names – over the course of Exodus God's name expands – their understanding of who God is grows –

At the burning bush – Moses asks of God, who shall I say sends me – God replies, "I Am. Tell the people that I Am sent you."

God expounds on this statement reminding them,

- I Am the God of your ancestors
- I Am the Lord your God who brought you out of slavery
- I Am gracious and merciful

Throughout Exodus, God builds on the I Am – adding to the Divine name

Then in Exodus 33, Moses asks of the almighty "will you walk alongside us?" "will you be with us?"

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The Hebrew word Moses uses is emanu – will you be emanu – el "God with us"

Moses asks of God, "will you be emanu – el "God with us?"

This word rings a resounding toll in the ears of Christians – especially in Advent – when we prepare for God’s light descending into darkness
– we speak this name with reverent awe to refer to Jesus “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”
– it is a reminder to us that God is more than a force out there ...God is a presence standing alongside us in the trenches of life...

- **The Holy Companion** who shepherds us in wilderness & hosts us at table – both in this life & the life to come!
- **The Holy Forecaster** whose very voice can calm the storms which rage around us!
- **The Holy Acolyte** who illuminates even the darkest valleys!
- **The One** who answers our terrified cries – “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”
- **The One** gets into the boat with us and stills the winds.

Advent 2020 may not feel like brilliant celebration - and yet - it still holds onto persistent hope, and peace, and joy, and love because when God’s light descended and ascended there was a promise,

- “I am with you always.”
- Emmanuel – God with us!

May it still be so!

May it still be so!

Amen & Amen.