

Mark 6: 30-34, 53-end

I once saw a mug that said this on the front: "I believe God has certain jobs for us to do before we die. At the moment, I'm so far behind that I'm going to live forever!"

There's also this other prayer that I like, which was written in the 15th Century by Sir Jacob Astley:

"O Lord! thou knowest how busy I must be this day: if I forget thee, do not thou forget me."

I think most of us at one time or another have felt like this – that we're going to have to live forever to keep up with our job list. We have at times all felt completely overwhelmed by how busy we actually are. We all have the best plans laid out as to what we can achieve within a given amount of time and we never manage to achieve it. Sir Jacob Astley felt really busy enough to write a prayer about it 500 years ago. And in our Gospel reading, looking back 2000 years ago, Jesus and the disciples were feeling overwhelmed by how busy they were too.

If we look at what happened just before this reading, it was a really busy time for Jesus and the disciples - the disciples had been sent out by Jesus in pairs to heal the sick and cast out demons, which must have been an amazing but also very tiring time. And there was also the shock and grief of hearing about John the Baptist's death to contend with too. At the beginning of this reading, the disciples come back together to tell Jesus all about what they've done whilst they've been out in their pairs.

I can imagine their excitement whilst they're telling Jesus what they have done. But then Jesus does the opposite to what we are expecting...Jesus tells them to go and rest. Jesus spots how even in all their joy of their recent experiences, how tired and weary they are. It's the opposite of what we expect because in the Western world, if you've been successful, you expect to have to work even harder to keep that success going. If you've been successful, there is always the fear that you will become unsuccessful if you take the foot off the accelerator and rest for a while.

But I think that Jesus really does lead by example within this passage: Jesus gives his disciples the example to work, rest and pray. Anyone remember the old mars bars advert?: a mars a day helps you work, rest and play! Well I've just adapted it slightly: to be a disciple today, you have to work, rest and pray!

So first, we have to work:

In the Gospel today – we see that Jesus worked hard to help those in need. He helped and healed as many people as he could. He had compassion towards those in need and he saw them as being sheep without a shepherd – they had no-one to help or protect them or lead them. Jesus fed their spiritual needs by teaching them about God, but Jesus also fed their physical needs too by healing those who were ill. Jesus also physically fed them at the feeding of the five thousand – it's actually in the middle of the Gospel reading today – a bit that we didn't read out is Mark 6: 37-44. Jesus made sure that his sheep were cared for both spiritually and physically. Jesus was never too busy to do the work of God and to minister to his people.

But Jesus also understood the demands of being busy and that we can't minister to others needs if we ourselves are working from an empty cup.

So secondly, we must rest:

As we know Jesus tried to do this with his disciples. He tried to take them off to a quiet place. Now in this instance it didn't quite work as they were followed by the crowd, but I'm sure even just a couple

of hours of rest on the boat was better than nothing. We all need to rest and we all need to get away from our usual busy times for a holiday every now and then. And at the moment, with covid, I know that getting away from everything can be more difficult, but even grabbing a couple of hours rest and relaxation like the disciples on the boat can make all the difference.

Thirdly Jesus gives us the example to pray:

In Mark 6: 46 (again another part between the two parts of text from the Gospel reading today) Jesus goes off up a mountain on his own to pray. It's something that Jesus often did at difficult or tiring times in his ministry. In Mark 6, Jesus prayed before walking on water and before healing the sick. And I don't think that that is a coincidence. To be able to do God's work and ministry, we need to be attuned to God – so we must spend time listening and speaking to God in prayer. When we're busy prayer time is often the first thing that gets squeezed out of our day.

C. S. Lewis, author of 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' and 'Mere Christianity', said : "The moment you wake up each morning, all your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists in shoving it all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other, larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in."

So, we need to find time to ensure that the quieter life can flow in. I think it helps to have somewhere you can go to that you won't be disturbed – Jesus often went into a garden or up a mountain, and I find that helps for me – being somewhere out in nature where I know I won't be disturbed, but it could be a particular room in your house, a park or perhaps even your car! What ever works for you and your context.

Within Mark 6, Jesus teaches us that our daily lives should be about balance. Working – not only so that we can pay the bills and keep a roof over our heads but working for God and for God's ministry here on earth. Resting – to recharge our batteries, spending time doing things that feed us not drain us. Praying – spending time with God every day – listening and speaking to God.

Getting that balance right isn't always easy – but we need to keep trying. I pray that all of you find the balance that's right in your lives so that you can work, rest and pray like the disciple that God has called you to be.

Amen.