

2025 TALK – LENT 3, PSALM 46, MARK 6:30-34

RHYTHMS OF REST

I thought we could start today with something the very opposite of restful. Listen for a few moments to a soundtrack. This is the sound of Dhaka, capital city of Bangladesh, one of the most densely populated cities in the world. It also happens to be where Carey's BMS Mission Partners, Peter & Louise Lynch live. This is what they wake up to every day... On this soundtrack there are also 4 other 'noise-scapes', to gauge our reaction to different sounds. Sorry, this is very brief & not intended to be a torture session!... We finish by listening to some sounds which are actually restful & relaxing. But first, this...

(LISTEN TO DHAKA)...

The BBC news app where I found this soundtrack, included some research into the effect that such persistent background noise has on the human body & mind. Heart health is particularly affected. Our bodies are hard-wired to have an emotional response to all sounds. Our heart rate increases in response to certain threatening noises. Our adrenalin kicks in. Our fight or flight response is activated. Our body releases stress hormones... This can even happen when we are sleeping... If you are exposed for several years, this increases the risk of heart attack, high blood pressure, stroke & type 2 diabetes... (What's the opposite to 'Alleluia' ? Perhaps a thumbs down & a big booo...).

So, there's the bad news. But the good news we can see in Psalm 46 and in the story of Jesus in Mark 6. God wants us to live a more restful life. God invites us to develop our own 'Rhythms of rest'.

Someone in Dhaka has launched a campaign to persuade drivers not to use their horns so much. Apparently, it has already had an effect on lessening noise pollution. But preferring not to use the horn, rather than always reacting with an angry beep, is a personal discipline for each driver to develop. Personal disciplines are what the season of Lent & what today's talk is all about.

We tend to think that life during the 1st Century would have been a lot quieter. A much slower pace of life. This is true, to a certain extent. Not so much technology. Smaller populations. But I was reminded at the retreat day I attended the other week, that people tended to live a lot closer together, in

smaller houses, large families. And thin walls. A lot of people living like refugees are forced to live like today.

The story of Mark 6 reminds us of how stressful life could quickly become in the days of Jesus. The disciples have just returned from their first mission without Jesus. A challenging & exhausting time for them. They return to report to Jesus all they have done & all they have learned. But there are so many people coming & going, so many demands on Jesus & his disciples, that they don't even get time to eat... This seems to be a trigger for Jesus. A clear warning sign which prompts him to say this: **'Come away with me, by yourselves, to a quiet place & get some rest'...** Here, & elsewhere, Jesus makes a point of not just finding a quiet place for himself, to seek his Heavenly Father & to find rest. Jesus is deliberate & intentional about finding a quiet place for himself & his disciples. They first find some kind of rest by going on a boat trip.

We know what happens. This is all too familiar to us. Something gets in the way of the plan to rest... People run to catch up with Jesus. So, when they land, Jesus & the disciples are confronted with people who have come from all over to hear Jesus & to ask for healing. The demands of the needy crowds of people crowd in. But this is not at all like the scene from the musical, 'Jesus Christ, Superstar', where the demands of the crowd at one point seem to overwhelm Andrew Lloyd Webber's version of Jesus. But, let's not forget two things here.

First of all, Jesus takes the initiative & teaches the people. After all, Jesus is probably more rested than the disciples at this point, having not gone with the disciples on their mission to the villages around. Here, Jesus is harvesting where his disciples have sown the seeds of good news, before him.

Secondly, we cannot forget what happens next. One of the most profound miracles from Jesus' ministry... When we come to an end of ourselves & our resources, it's then that God is able to step in. Jesus' uses one child's meal to feed this crowd of thousands. And what could be more therapeutic & restful than this? For these people to eat together & to be satisfied? What better picture of the Kingdom of God, than for a multitude to be feasting on the abundance of God's creation, in this quiet, remote place...?. Jesus' used the disciples tiredness & them coming to an end of themselves as a glorious teaching opportunity. A time to wonderfully demonstrate God's love for all.

(I'm looking forward later to joining a lot of you later, to celebrate Debbie's birthday in our hall with her family). The Kingdom of God is among us. PTL!

There are a number of lessons that this story of planned rest frustrated teaches us: Firstly, sometimes we have to put our desire to rest to one side for a time. But our 2nd lesson is equally important. And it's one I would like us to focus on today, during this season of Lent. And it's this:

We need to work on both identifying what we might call 'counterfeit rest', as well as developing our skills for true rest. If the crowds had not followed them to that spot, there might have been a temptation for the disciples to use that time to continue the conversations about their latest mission. From what we know of the disciples & ourselves, it's possible that Peter & Andrew might have wanted to show Jesus how their mission visits were 'better' than the visits of James & John... We can all find ways of filling up our time with things that we might think of as restful, but they are not.

Counterfeit rest might include things like: binge-watching TV programmes; scrolling through social media; comfort eating; developing poor sleep patterns. Many of these are understandable in the stressful world we live in today. Of course, poor sleep patterns, eg, can be the result of difficult work patterns, like working nights or shift patterns which change from week to week...

But God wants us to develop more disciplined rest patterns & to work on what we might call our 'rest skills'. After all, Paul calls us to do everything we do 'as unto the LORD'... So then - our rest is also worship to God.

I invite you all to consider how you experience rest. Because as with everything, we are all different when it comes to rest. What type of rest do we find most needful right now? (Physical rest / Social rest / Active rest / Creative rest / Emotional rest / Sensory rest / Mental rest ?)... Where is our most obvious 'rest deficit' right now? This is something this Lent, which I believe God wants us to take seriously. At a time when we think about God's action in Jesus... We also think about the time that Jesus spent in restful prayer, alone with God, in remote places. This was both during the time of his temptation in the desert. But also throughout his ministry. Jesus developed a discipline of making sure he spent time with his Heavenly Father, every day. For Jesus, this seems to have been very early in the morning... But you might prefer a different time in the day to seek God... !

Our very active (possibly over-active) Baptist mind-set means that we have much to learn from more contemplative forms of Christian spirituality. I hadn't realised until now that the term 'workaholic' was first coined from a study of Christian leaders. We all tend to base our worth far too much on what we have done & are doing. There is always this temptation to revert to a salvation by works, rather than salvation by God's grace. You've heard this before, but we are human beings, not human doings.

Important for us all to develop better rest & to think more carefully about what this means for each of us. As Mark chapter 6 teaches us, it's vital that we don't wait until our screens are flashing red before we find time for a pause. Even in our busiest days, when we might think, 'there's no time for me to pause right now'. It's on those days that it's even more important to make a point of having regular breaks. Maybe just 5 minutes, or 2 minutes of a sustained 'breather'. Just like whales, we all need to come up for air at regular intervals.

Or how about a 'power nap'...? That might seem impossible. But according to the blessed Dr Michael Moseley, a 20 min 'siesta' is all that is needed to feel like you have re-charged your batteries. It's funny that we need to find a phrase like 'power nap' to justify it to ourselves... The tradition of a Spanish 'siesta' is a good one. (Although it's problematic if you work in an office & you don't have an understanding employer... Or if you are caring for children, for example...).

We all need to find the blessing of different kinds of pauses. Time to catch up with ourselves. Time to check-in with our bodies. Time to be aware of God's presence. Time to listen to God's voice.

The famous musician, Claude Debussy, once famously said: 'Music is the space between the notes'. Whatever we do this week, let us find a way of 'playing the pauses', of appreciating the rests. Here are some ways you might want to do this, this week. To practise the art of 'slow spirituality' by: (READ LIST)

Jesus invites you to come **with** him. Jesus invites you to come **to** him. Jesus invites **YOU** to a quiet place. Jesus invites **YOU** to rest & to be...

Let's now spend some time listening to a piece of music ... The prophet Jeremiah said to the people of God in his day: 'Ask where the good way is and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls'...

(MUSIC)

God says: 'Be still & know that I am God – I will be exalted in the nations, I will be exalted in the earth'.