

In our hi-tech, wired and wireless world,
those companies that want to get ahead
advertise 24x7x365 customer service.
They are available for you anytime you need them.

Think about how many stores just in my
limited lifetime have become 24 hrs and 365 days a year.
Wal-Mart. Kroger. Convenience stores and gas stations. Restaurants.
Most don't even close on holidays like
Thanksgiving or even Christmas now.
Just ten years ago most did.

It's a full time, on call life for those who
want to shoot to the top rung of the ladder these days.
Back in the late 1990's the well equipped corporate
executive or employee of our time carried a pager.
Remember the pager?

Everybody had to have one so they could be in touch.
That annoying beeping unless you to happen
to find someone with enough etiquette to set it on vibrate.
Most people just wanted it to be loud so
everyone knew they were important.
And the miracle was that you could know somebody
was calling you and what number.
Anybody still have a pager?

I remember my first pager while I was seminary.
Cell phones were just transitioning from the Nokia bag phone.
Remember them?
The phone was the size of a dayplanner
or small notebook and you carried it around from place to place.
Still not very practical.

Then the miracle happened
cellular telephones became a manageable size.
All of a sudden two way connection was portable.
And then it happened the world decided that
we all need one of these.

How did we make it all those years
with only payphones and house phones?
Try to find a payphone now.
So now everybody needed a pager or a cell phone.
And *everyone* needs one - don't they?

Pagers then and now cell phones are being marketed today as a necessity - not a luxury. There is many a parent whose child feels abused because they are the only one among their friends who does not have one.

"How are my friends supposed to get hold of me?"

they plead with their parents.

And now I have heard even the other angle which is the parent saying my child needs a cell phone because otherwise how can I possibly get hold of them?

Instantaneous communication.

That is all we will accept nowadays.

We have all seen it.

You go to dinner at a restaurant and you hear a phone ringing.

Someone at a table nearby pulls out a cell phone and begins a conversation that simply cannot wait.

That is so important that I must answer it while I am in front of the cashier at the checkout line. Or driving down the road while I fiddle with the radio and eat my fast food.

One pastor writes "I knew it was only a matter of time, but it finally happened. Someone on the church council asked if I would like the church to buy a pager for me.

"Gee thanks," I replied, "But I am still researching to discover if pagers might be an instrument of the devil!"

If there was not a commandment about lying, I would have been tempted to say,

"No thanks, my doctor told me they could interfere with my pacemaker."

And now not only do we have instant voice communication but also email communication and texting as well.

How many of you have some device that gets email on your phones?

The most popular right now would be the Blackberry.

No it's not the kind you pick and eat that are so sweet.

It is a little device affectionately known as the crackberry because it is so addicting.

Texting is the same way.

People today have to been in touch with one another every single minute of every day.

Today's gospel lesson details an incredibly busy Jesus with his disciples.

The Gospel of Mark, in particular, gives a view of Jesus always working and rarely able to take a break.

Listen to this account of one day in Jesus' life from chapter 1 in the Gospel of Mark:

"That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.

And the whole city was gathered around the door.

And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

And Simon and his companions hunted for him.

When they found him, they said to him,

"Everyone is searching for you."

Now, I just have to wonder –

if Jesus came today, would he carry a pager?

A cell phone? A blackberry?

I can just see Peter with his cell phone texting his BFF Jesus

"Lord, everyone is looking for u, can you call us back right away!"

In our text two weeks ago,

Jesus called his 12 apostles and sent them out to do the work they had witnessed in him.

He sent them out two by two, and they took with them the authority to cast out demons, to anoint the sick, to cure broken bodies, to teach people about the kingdom of God.

Who knows just how long they were out there, but by the end of their mission and upon their return, when they saw Jesus in the distance, they probably started off into a pure sprint to reach him, much like that son who ran into his father's wide open arms, after being away too long.

Their return from their maiden adventure is not documented in any readily available Christian art but what if it was?

One writer says it might look something like this. With brilliant brush strokes on a large canvas,

the scene could be painted for this tender moment.
The largest object would be the tree covered
in hues of green leaves that are dancing
in the gentle evening sunlight.

Collapsed beneath it, bathed in its generous shade,
the apostles gather around Jesus,
this rag-tag band of former fishermen and freshly formed messengers,
exhausted from their recently frantic lives.
The scars of their travels cover their bodies....

Without any protection and a lack of traveling food supply,
dependent on the kindness of strangers for a simple meal,
these men are thinner than before, their ribs exposed
through torn clothing, the same garments they departed in.

Most of them have tan lines running across their feet,
where their sandals--now removed--once pressed
in the soles of them worn thin, evidence of the miles they had covered,
and the number of times the sand had been knocked off on an inhospitable doorstep.

These men are reclining next to Jesus,
you feel they have been telling him story after story,
of how many people they were able to help,
of how many lives that have been restored,
but all at an expense to their own selves.

They are nestled into the green grass that covers the landscape,
staring up into the white clouds dotting a sky,
giving birth to a perfect shade of blue.
Just on the left side of the canvas is a lake, still and quiet,
yet the remnants of a storm linger far in the distance.
Just at the edge of the water is a boat,
one that has weathered many storms,
but is strong and sturdy, and ready to hold the apostles,
and all their cares.

However, if you look on the other side of that lake,
just barely recognizable, there seems to be crowd
of people heading this direction.

Then, on the other side of the canvas,
off in the distance, just at the crest of a hill,
you can faintly see another crowd coming into view.
They know where Jesus and his disciple are,
and they will soon be within earshot demanding

the attention and compassion of them all.

The artist has painted Jesus as the only one
whose face is turned towards the crowds.
His expression is one of knowing,
without a hint of panic that the disciples could predict.
Besides, most of them are gazing into the sky
as they remember their adventures, reflecting on their work,
feeling their exhaustion, and one or two are already fast asleep.

Jesus, sensing that his precious children need to rest,
knowing they have nothing else to give,
yet seeing the crowd approaching,
whispers an invitation to his disciples,
an offering of all they need:

"Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."
Even shepherds need a Sabbath.
If we study this picture long enough,
we can probably identify with almost every
aspect of it or emotion in it,
although some may draw us in closer than others.

We can identify with those storm clouds in the distance,
the trials we have overcome,
the difficult journeys we have been on,
the mountains we have climbed.

We can probably name the things that feel like
the crowds lingering just over a hill, or around the bend—
pressures to work long hours to meet deadlines
or the stress of not having work at all;
school projects or papers, pressures to finish an assignment,
exams to prepare for.

There are responsibilities for families we love dearly,
beautiful children that need us constantly,
or the pain of a broken connection
and the dreams that have been shattered.
And on top of all those emotions,
we are overwhelmed by the
amount of things there are to DO in our lives....
Each day we are pressured to give more,
produce more, care more, and accomplish more.

Our lives can be so busy—
the world can make so many demands,
and even when they are wonderful things we love,
life can still be so busy... physically, emotionally, exhaustingly busy.

Barbara Brown Taylor's in her latest book:
An Altar in the World. notes that in China
the polite answer to the question of "How are you?"
is to say, "I am very busy, thank you."

That is the measure of our success—
an indication of how we run in this world—
and measure of lives, no matter where we live.
We are hooked in, signed on, trading, buying,
selling, dating, checking email and answering
our cell phones around the clock.

Take a nap and somebody just might
take over your company, steal your girlfriend
or give your job to someone else.

Where is there time for rest?,
you snooze you lose may not be the official slogan
of the 21st century but in a culture moving
at warp speed don't be surprised if it makes the top ten.
Come away to a deserted place
all by yourselves and rest a while.
Even shepherds need a Sabbath.

I believe Jesus is issuing three calls to the disciples
and to us if we will only listen.
First Jesus is giving a call to rest.
After Jesus has sent his disciples out in pairs
on a mission of teaching and healing,
he called them to a time of rest.

*"Then, because so many people were coming and going
that they did not even have a chance to eat,
he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves
to a quiet place and get some rest." Mk. 6:31 NIV.*

Jesus was calling his disciples to a
practice he was familiar with.
After all its one of the Ten Commandments.
The ones we want so bad to post in public buildings
yet most of us couldn't name all ten if I put you on the spot.

It is kind of the Rodney Dangerfield of the Decalogue-
the only one of the ten that gets no respect.
We can actually be heard to sit around and whining,
almost boasting about how busy we are.

But with the other commandments
how many of us who would be sitting around boasting
Gee I've got to commit adultery tomorrow.
Think about it.

Serving others can be a draining task
and Jesus was in ministry from sunup to sundown.
He renewed his strength by separating himself
from the cries and crises of the world
and spending time with God in prayer.

Dorothy Bass who has written several books
about the Sabbath says she urges church leaders
to not conduct business on Sunday.

That is hard to do since we are now almost
so busy that Sunday is the day to do that.
But I want to encourage you to do that very thing.
Everyone who comes to church here including our leaders
is here to worship not to fix problems or deal
with tasks related to their areas of ministry
with the exception of those who serve on Sunday morning.

What I am suggesting is that if we need something
from a church leader whether it be finance or trustees
or staff parish or something else don't talk to them
about it before, during or after worship.
Contact them on Monday not Sunday.

They have come here to worship and find Sabbath
not the crowd waiting on the other shore.
I do my best not to deal with church business
during our Sunday mornings.

They are gaining our source of strength for the week.
Recharging their batteries.
The disciples are now called away from the world
to learn their source of strength for ministry.
The very first item in the shepherd's psalm,
Psalm 23 is, "*He makes me lie down...*"
Have you ever had a time when you were burning

the candle on both ends, the demands of home and work were relentless -- and then you found yourself with the worst case of the flu or a cold ever?

It seems to be built in - if we do not take time to rest – the Lord will, "...**make us to lie down!**"

No Jesus would not be carrying a cell phone.

While he was "*waiting upon the Lord,*"

the world would have to wait for him.

His life and ministry clearly teach us that

if we do not receive from God,

we will have nothing to give for God.

Let me say that again.

Jesus also is giving a call to renewal.

The call to rest goes much deeper than simple physical rest.

It is in times of being led "*beside still waters,*"

that our spirits are refreshed and renewed.

"*Be still, and know that I am God!*"

the Psalmist wrote.

One of the most familiar verses in the Old Testament has to do with renewal, "*But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.* [Is. 40:31]

There is a kind of current myth that infects our high tech culture.

The pager and cell phone give the impression

that people can be always available and always ready to serve.

"Instant access" is the byword.

"No waiting! I'm here for you at all times."

The myth of constant availability and "no waiting" problem solving is an "Omnipotence" illusion.

God alone is the One who "never slumbers" and whose right arm never fails.

We, on the other hand, not only need our sleep,

but our right arm, our courage, our commitment

and our strength fail if we do not take time for renewal.

Recent studies indicate that a significant percentage of Americans are sleep deprived. Sleep deprivation leaves us without the resources we need to function effectively.

Three of the reasons cited for sleep deprivation

according to a University of Nebraska Medical School study are:
not allowing enough time for sleep.
Excessive worry, depression and
repeated awakenings from noise.

One of the most serious effects of this constant state
of tiredness for many people is automobile accidents.
Next to alcohol, sleep deprivation is the leading cause
of serious accident and injury.

Sleep deprivation is a good analogy for our spiritual lives.
The same principles that apply to our physical life
apply to the spiritual dimension.
When we go without spiritual renewal,
we are bound for something like an auto accident –
a "crash" in the spiritual life.

Without renewal of spirit we cannot function
properly in the spiritual dimension of life.
The bible uses the image of a "*dry and thirsty land*"
to describe what we might call *spirit deprivation*.
The causes are similar to the causes of sleep deprivation.
We do not allow time for renewal.
We worry excessively because we do not
allow time for the prayer that can bring peace to our living.
We allow the "noise" of this world to
drown out the *still small voice of God*.

Unfortunately, pastors and lay leaders in the church
are not exempt from the burnout *anyone*
will experience if they do not find time for renewal.
Spiritual burnout is one of the most significant factors
for the powerlessness of the church in many quarters.

Caring for ourselves is the one place those of us
who labor in the Lord's vineyard tend to *cheat* –
as clergy **or** laypersons.
When those who give leadership to the church
do not care for themselves,
it is not a question of *if* the church *and* its leaders
will suffer the consequences –
but *when* those consequences will surface.

Sometimes as a leader you have to
know when to say no.
Most of time in the church there are a small number

of people doing far more than they should be doing.
Those leaders ride the line between burnout and disillusionment.

And personally I believe that no one should serve
on more than two committees in a church especially
if they are serving on one of the major ones
like finance, trustees or staff parish.
You can't serve on five committees and
do them all with excellence.

No Jesus would not carry a blackberry.
And I believe he would ask his followers
who *do* carry those things to put them down
for an hour a day, an afternoon a week and a day a month –
so they could spend the time alone with him.

He would be the one saying.
C'mon put that thing down and come spend with me.
It's the same call that I and those of you
who are parents have heard from the lips of our children.
Daddy, Mommy please come play with me,
come spend time with me.
And what is our answer I can't I'm too busy.
I hope not.

Many a song has been written about missing out on things.
A few come to mind.
Cat's in the Cradle from the 70's.
You're gonna miss this by Trace Adkins popular right now.
Butterfly kisses and Cinderella by Steven Curtis Chapman.
Or Time well wasted by Brad Paisley.
Jesus is saying come on waste some time with me.
The ironic part is that it would be not be time wasted.
There is a third call. It is the call to return.
The spiritual retreat is just that. A *retreat*.
The world will call us back soon enough –
indeed it will usually call us back *too* soon.

Just as we must become available
to God for spiritual renewal,
so we must become available
once again to the anguish of a broken world
for its healing and renewal.

In our gospel lesson today,
the retreat Jesus wanted for his followers

did not fully get off the ground.
In the midst of a busy schedule when there was
not even time to sit down for a meal,
Jesus and his disciples take a boat and
head out for a time of "rest."

It turned out that the boat ride was
the only seclusion they got.
When Jesus and his disciples got to their retreat destination,
the world was already waiting.

Wherever he went, there was teaching
and healing to be done.
Jesus and his disciples lived lives of tension
and delicate balance between receiving
from God and giving *for* God.
The one cannot take place without the other.

There would be times, like the experience
on the Mount of Transfiguration
when they did get away from the world for a time,
but there was always the *descent* after the *ascent*.

As long as the followers of Jesus are in the world
they are to be present to the world
as Jesus Christ himself would be.
And they are to be available to God
while they are in the world.

There will be a rhythmic flow in our lives
of the call to rest, call to renewal and call to return.
In this sense, the Christian life is like a three legged stool.
If any is weak, the stool will finally collapse.
And even without the pager, cell phone and blackberry
Jesus life was a model of active engagement
with the needs of the world while living out
ministry enabling engagement with the Lord God.
Priorities in balance!

The key issue is, can we keep our priorities in line
and model a healthy life balance while carrying a pager
or a cell phone or a blackberry?
A good question to ask is,
*"Am I as anxious to be in touch with God
as I am to be in touch with the world?"*

And then I think about Jesus' invitation again....
We too could use that cool grass between our toes,
the blue sky overhead, the rest underneath a tree,
the Jesus who listens to us.

And the gift is that we too are on the guest list,
and Jesus extends the same invitation to us,
in our weary, tired lives, with demands just around the corner.

"Come away to a deserted place all
by yourselves and rest a while."
The invitation is there, and the painting is not complete...
until we can see ourselves as a part of it.

Accepting Jesus' invitation may not be so clean
as a boat floating on the open sea,
far from all the things we need to escape from.
But accepting his invitation is crucial for our lives
for us to live the abundant life he intends for us.

We, like the apostles, are not able
to give from a place that is empty.
We are not able to be present, fully present,
to our families, our lives, our work, unless we can—
for however long-- be fully present to Jesus
in a place that nourishes our very souls.

Our one task is to put this ahead of all the other things...
to open ourselves up to hear his invitation,
and respond with the space and the time
to listen to his call to take our heavy laden lives,
and offer it all to Jesus who will take it from us,
even for just a little while.

Listen to his voice, calling us into perfect peace,
the kind that only he can give.
"Come away to a deserted place all
by yourselves and rest a while."
Even shepherds need a Sabbath.
Will you answer his call? Amen.