



Be Still and Know... (Mark 6: 30-44)

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to go on my first spiritual retreat at the New Camoldoli Hermitage in Big Sur. For those of you who haven't had the pleasure of driving down there I would highly recommend it. Big Sur is a magnificent area of coast between Monterrey and San Luis Obispo. The waves crash against big brown and grey rocks that jut up through the blue green surf and if you go at the right time of year you might catch a glimpse of a migrating whale.

In the small settlement of Santa Lucia, which is perched on the edge of the Santa Lucia mountains, the monks of the Camaldolese monastery have a ministry to the public. They provide retreat space, particularly for pastors, priests, and people who do ministry of some sort. On your retreat you can pray with the monks as they observe the services of their day..

The monks provide each person on retreat a room, with a private bath, a twin bed, a small chair, and accoutrements for making herbal teas. The garden of the simple room looks out over the Pacific Ocean and guests are welcome to tend the flowers and rest in a chair there. There is also a library nearby stocked with books and several trails on which to take a walk along the coast.

This sounded like heaven to me. And I couldn't have been more pleased when the church I was serving gifted me with a retreat there. I am not sure what the congregation was saying to me with this, but the catch was.. I discovered after I got there.. that the retreats were all silent. Nobody was allowed to speak at the Camaldolese monastery.

I also found since I didn't have a lot to occupy my time with that I looked forward very much to the wonderful food that the monks prepared in their kitchen and brought for us to eat at mealtime. Like most things at the hermitage the kitchen was simple... with a small refrigerator and stove.. and a sink with a small sign with the words of the Psalmist scrawled in a monk's handwriting.. "Be still and know I am God." On the way there was another penciled sign that reminded the reader of Jesus' words spoken to his disciples in John's gospel. "Peace be still."

The monks made homemade pastas, and soups, and salads from fresh greens, cucumbers, and tomatoes from their garden up on the hill. They also made delicious breads, and dressings for the salads. There was one dressing that I particularly liked. It was a low fat Italian dressing made with fresh herbs, oil, and vinegar. I was having trouble with my stomach and gallbladder at the time, and was scheduled for surgery. So I was pleased to find a salad dressing that did not hurt my stomach and was so tasty.

Now it seems like it would be heaven to be still, to take the time to really contemplate and live the words scrawled on those signs in the monks kitchen.. It seems like it would be heaven to be able to cultivate inner peace and not have a lot to do but contemplate the beauty of the ocean and mountains, and to rest a lot and not speak. But it was a lot harder than I thought it would be.



The first night I was there, my mind raced all over the place. When I tried to shut the screen door quietly it creaked so loud that I thought they must have been able to hear it in the next county, and everytime I went outside the door would shut with a thud, that I was sure everyone could hear. If I turned on the water, or flushed the toilet, it seemed deafening. Everything I seemed to do was loud, and as I tried hard to be quieter, it got worse.

By the morning of the second day, I had gotten the hang of being quiet a little better. In the shared kitchen there was that little sign over the sink that encouraged me “Be still and know that I am God..”

But it seemed that as I tried to be quieter, my mind got more active. It is funny what goes on in your mind when there are no TV’s, computers, voices, cellphones, traffic, and the various other noises that we live with everyday around us.

By suppertime, I was looking forward to having a big crisp salad with fresh greens, and some homemade vegetable soup. I remember thinking that I hoped the monks brought more of that Italian dressing because I had liked it so much the day before. Sure enough they did. And as I climbed into bed that night, I remember thinking what a success my day had been. I had read, and worked on a watercolor of some flowers, I had rested, and enjoyed the wonderful food.

The next morning, when I went in for breakfast, and opened the refrigerator in the shared kitchen to get some juice, I noticed that the cruet of Italian dressing was sitting (along with some other dressings) on the second shelf. That is good. I remember thinking.. I will be able to have Italian dressing for with lunch and dinner. At lunch the monks brought a huge wooden bowl of salad, and I doused it with Italian dressing.

During the afternoon, as I retrieved a bottle of water from the refrigerator, I noticed that the dressing was getting a little low in the cruet. I couldn’t imagine having my salad without that dressing.. after all I was on a restricted diet.. so I felt justified.. So I looked around to make sure no one was looking and shoved that cruet of dressing back behind the milk where nobody else would see it. Feeling very happy with myself for thinking to do that, I went about my afternoon pleased with my success at cultivating inner peace in my life.

During the afternoon worship, although the monks sang in beautiful gregorian chant, and read one of my favorite scriptures in the 8th chapter of Romans, I found my mind wandering to that dressing. I hope nobody finds it, I thought, or it is going to run out. So I made sure I got out and moved inconspicuously toward the kitchen to check it before the other worshippers could get there. Sure enough, there it was when I opened the refrigerator door, tucked right behind the milk.

All through the third, fourth, and fifth days of my silent retreat, I did not utter a sound. And I was quite pleased with myself about that. I was living those words on the sign “Be still and know that I am God...” I was cultivating peace in my life following those words of Jesus’ “Peace be still.”



But I also kept an eye on that bottle of dressing. And much to my dismay, it was dwindling...By the afternoon of the fourth day, I skipped the worship service, so I could be first in line at dinner, so I could check and see if there was still some more of that dressing.

By the fifth day, I had devised an ingenious plan and decided to fish the remaining dressing out of the cruet in the refrigerator where it was now well hidden.. I put it in a paper bag, marked the bag "Jeanne" with a permanent sharpie, and went about my retreat, quite pleased with myself that I had been able to be quiet for five days and would probably make it to six.

You have probably noticed, that I have been preaching a lot about food over the past few weeks. I like to talk about bread of life, streams of living water, loaves and fishes, and cornbread and of course the ham that was too big for the pan. Today is no exception.. We are talking about food again.. after eating all that turkey and pomegranate cheesecake, and greenbean casserole and garlic mashed potatoes on Wednesday I still want to talk about food...Food is, after all, something that Jesus concerns himself with regularly, food that is nourishing in both physical and spiritual ways.

There are two versions of this story in the gospels. Mark tells one and John tells the other. In Mark's account of this well known story of the feeding of the 5000, Jesus says to his Disciples "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." In John's the Disciples and Jesus cross the sea of Galilee and he adds the detail that they "went up on a mountain" and sat down there.

Mark tells us that the whole crowd had five loaves and two fish. John adds the detail that Simon Peter finds a particular boy who has five barley loaves and two fish. And as both stories go, Jesus blesses the food and breaks the bread in a way that forshadows our weekly meals at this sacred table and everyone gets fed and there are baskets left over...

But Mark has one major difference in his version of this story that I want to concentrate on today. He offers some details here that a lot of scholars see as transitional or filler material that moves us from one story to another. But I think the section offers some important insights about what Jesus would have us to do and more importantly, not to do as we work to cultivate peace within ourselves that will spill out into the world as we move into this advent holiday season.

In verse 30 we are told that "The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught and he said to them "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.

Ever have days where you don't even make time to eat? Days that you are so busy taking care of everyone else, of everyone else's needs that you don't have time to care for yourself? Ever notice that you just keep running because you think "that is the only way its going to get done?" Or maybe you think "Well, they need me.. if I don't do it



nobody will.” Does this sound like you...Did this sound like you earlier this week? If it does.. then listen up.. Cause Mark has some good news for you this morning as we prepare to head into this advent season.

Notice that Jesus is busy. But Jesus is not a busybody. He is not so wrapped up in feeling like he has to care for everyone around him all the time. He honors his humanness. Here in Marks account, before he undertakes the huge task of feeding the 5000, He takes a break.. And friends, the good news is that he encourages his apostles and us to do the same.

Many of us do not know how to rest. If we are able to slow down physically then our minds race. If we do make time to sit down for a minute...We worry about the laundry, the dry cleaning, or maybe even terrorism or other violence around us... We wonder what we will fix for dinner, how we will pay the rent or the heat or Visa bill, and what is next for us...

We wonder why God hasn't answered our prayers...We remember that the dog needs to go out, and notice that the curtains are hanging crooked.. that there is dust on the VCR, and the kids left their junk all over the living room again. And we may obsess about the neighbors yard, our children, our parents, friends, neighbors, and Yes even that darn salad dressing. All the while missing the still small voice that whispers to us.. Peace....be still.. and know that I am God.

Even if we do find the time to be still.. It is still hard to make our minds be quiet isn't it. And I believe that is exactly what Jesus is telling us to take the time to do here. He is telling us to make some transitional spaces in our lives.. some time between the wild thoughts, and the obsessions, and the busybodyness, and the crazy things that go on in our lives.

You might be tempted to say. Well he is Jesus! He is the son of God! Of course he can be still! But I want you to remember this morning that Jesus had a very human side and he has been going through some very difficult things... A few verses before our scripture reading this morning, Jesus has lost his friend John the Baptist. Before that, Folks from his hometown of Nazareth have rejected him, and he has spent a tremendous amount of energy healing numerous people.. It is important to remember Jesus had a very human side because it makes his life even more powerful for each of us. I wonder what he must have felt.. sadness... grief.. Did he ever get tired? My guess is he did.. so in our scripture reading today he provides a wonderful example for us and takes the time to be still.

Maybe Jesus was even thinking of that Psalm as he enjoyed eating his quiet meal in that deserted place. The one scrawled in black sharpie pen in the Monk's kitchen that I walked past and missed the point of as I was devising ways to pilfer salad dressing.. “Be still and know that I am God.”

The good news for all of us is that we know that after Jesus rests he will “have compassion on the crowd” and he will begin to teach them many things, and feed every one of them.. But only after he rests... only after eats and after he takes the time to be



Sermon from Rev. Jeanne Loveless
Senior Pastor
First Christian Church
San Lorenzo, CA
www.sanlorenzochurch.org

still.,, only after he finds God in the depths of that stillness. So he can move with power and be god's hands and eyes in the world. This morning friends, in the stillness of our hearts as we contemplate what to do next as we move into this busy advent season...I believe he encourages each of us to do the same.