



**July 18, 2021, Worship Sermon**  
**" Come Rest for a While "**  
Delivered by Rev. Stephen Keiser

***Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 23; Ephesians 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56***

Jesus said to his disciples, "Come away with me to a deserted place all by yourselves, and rest for a while."

What an encouraging word to hear on this third Sunday in July, when so many people are contemplating vacations... taking some time away for rest. Remember, from the very first chapter of the Bible, rest is lifted up as a virtue. God rested after creating the heavens and the earth and God commanded us human beings, who are made in God's image, to rest as well.

There are so many reasons why the Bible encourages us to rest:

- Rest gives our bodies the time they need to restore themselves;
- Rest gives us the opportunity to engage in activities that don't necessarily put food on the table, like spending time with friends or making beautiful music;
- Rest is an act of humility... a person who rests knows that the whole world doesn't depend on their constant activity;
- Rest elevates our dignity as human beings, reminding us that a person's worth is not determined by how productive they are;
- And, perhaps most of all, rest is an act of faith... when we rest, we trust that God will provide what we need to get us through this time of rest... we take time to remember that God - not our own labor - is the source of all blessings.

So, I hope you are able to take some time for rest. I am very grateful that Christ Lutheran Community Church gave me the opportunity to rest last week. I spent several days in the Adirondack mountains reading and relaxing by a lake in the cool, mountain air. Thank you for giving me the gift of rest.

Of course, if you really wanted to show your pastor how much you cared for him, you could have booked him a trip with Jeff Bezos on the Blue Origin. Granted, it's a little more expensive than a week in the Adirondacks. A seat on the rocket that will take Jeff Bezos and five others on an eleven-minute flight into space cost \$28,000,000.00. If that doesn't sound like conspicuous consumption to you, consider the fact that one of the people who paid 28 million for a seat had to cancel because of a scheduling conflict. Maybe some people have too much money.

You may wonder why I am making this about rich versus poor. In fact, our Gospel reading this morning IS about rich versus poor... or at least it's about powerful versus vulnerable. This story of Jesus and the disciples trying to get some rest takes place immediately following the story we heard last week, the story of Herod beheading John the Baptist. Remember, King Herod throws a lavish banquet and invites all the elites of Jerusalem. But the party goes haywire when Herod makes a foolish vow, and in order to save face, ends up executing John. That story of this decadent, obscene orgy of the wealthy and powerful should be ringing in your ears as you read about Jesus

showing compassion to the crowds of hurting people who are like sheep without a shepherd. Keep leaders like Herod in mind as you read our passage from Jeremiah: “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!” says the Lord.

What these readings are telling us is that King Jesus is nothing like King Herod, thank God! While Herod and his powerful friends throw lavish parties that end in violence, Jesus and his friends heal the sick and feed a hungry multitude with a few loaves and fish.

Getting back to Jeff Bezos, Jesus is nothing like Jeff Bezos, thank God! Actually, I shouldn't throw stones at Jeff Bezos. If I had \$200 billion dollars, I'm sure I would find much worse ways to spend it than he has. But since Bezos is in the news, it's worth making the comparison between his behavior and Jesus'. If you have \$28 million dollars, Jeff Bezos will give you an opportunity to escape this planet – at least for eleven minutes – escape all the suffering, and pain, and misery. Jesus, on the other hand, goes right into the midst of the suffering. Jesus doesn't try to escape planet earth; rather Jesus is God entering into planet earth. Jesus is God fulfilling the promise made to the prophet Jeremiah. In Jesus, God raises up a righteous shepherd, who cares for the sheep instead of dividing and destroying them.

Our scripture readings today give us a glimpse into the nature of God. They reveal a God who is tireless in compassion, who never rests from caring for those who are suffering. So, if you are feeling harassed and hopeless, know that this compassionate shepherd is the one who hears your prayers and seeks to make you whole.

We are not God. We are limited human beings who need time to rest. So that's why Jesus encourages the disciples to take time for rest and re-creation. Jesus knows our limitations. And after we have rested, Jesus invites us to participate in his ministry of caring for the world. Next week, we will hear the story of how Jesus invited the disciples to feed a crowd of 5000 people. At first, the disciples balked at the idea of serving so many people with just a few loaves of bread and fish. But Jesus multiplied their efforts so that everyone in the crowd could eat and be satisfied.

Thanks be to God who gives us rest from our labors; and thanks be to God who uses our labor to accomplish life-giving results.