

July 19, 2009

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

“All time is God’s time”

What an unusual summer we’ve been having--- with moderate, even cool temperatures punctuated by only a few muggy days with temps approaching or surpassing the 90 degree mark. I’ve heard more than a few people say, “I don’t even feel like we’ve HAD summer, but in a few short weeks it will be over!”

My grandson’s school has already sent one letter about gearing up for the year ahead and preparing to purchase school supplies!

TIME. It just seems like time gets away from us so quickly! And summertime is a precious time, definitely for kids still in school, but also for the rest of us.

In the summer, we hope to get a much needed break from the high intensity pace of our busy lives. We schedule some weekends away; we plan for a week or two of vacation.

Summertime in the church is different than the rest of the year too. The fluidity of summer schedules means that more families are out of town, and Sunday morning worship attendance drops. The Sunday School program is streamlined; the choral and instrumental groups suspend activity; and various committees delete a meeting or two from the calendar. It seems a bad time of year to schedule important meetings or to make earth-shattering future-shaping decisions.

We all need a break, a chance for well-deserved “personal time”. We need “time off”. But we have to be careful, because this can slip into our thinking that we can take “time off” from God.

If we’re honest, however, we need to acknowledge that no matter what the season we mentally segment our lives into “God’s time” and the “rest of our lives”. Our days evaporate as we grocery shop, attend staff meetings, crawl through commuter traffic, referee sibling squabbles, clean house, work in the yard, write reports, grade exams, keep co-workers informed, keep bosses informed, organize files, prepare meals and prepare for tomorrow’s demands. We struggle to “find time” for God. Some days we struggle to

remember that God exists. At our best we murmur a few rushed prayers in the car or at bedtime. We schedule a half hour to read Scripture here and there; we manage an hour of worship close to once a week, except, perhaps, during the summer.

This way of thinking about life is totally goofy. It turns God into a demanding companion, restlessly waiting at our elbows for us to “find time” to pay a little attention to him. We are overwhelmed by having this one more person (God/Jesus), this one more activity (our faith life) that we must squeeze into our exhausting routine.

I have good news. We don't need to find time for God. We just need to remember to find God in all of our time. Scripture teaches us that we can't separate life into “God times” and “God-less times”. Rev. Leonard Sweet puts this well: *Christians don't take “time off” from being Christina any more than our hearts can take “time off” from beating.* (Repeat.) In everything we do, we need to be recognizing and serving God.

Baker Memorial's simple, three line mission statement helps us with this—
Our mission is:
Loving God.
Serving Others.
Growing Together.

In the summer, fall, winter and spring! In activities that are directly church related, and in those that aren't. In our neighborhoods, jobs, local stores, voting booths, schools, vacation resorts, relative's homes and so on and on. We are to be loving God, serving others and growing together.

Last Thursday I needed to drop my van off at a local repair shop to have the brakes fixed. I left the vehicle there, and walked back to church to go to work. I walked home for lunch, then back to the church. At the end of the day I walked to the auto shop and picked up my van.

As I did this—I wasn't “making time for God”. I wasn't thinking about the church's mission in a conscious way. But—it was so good. I felt a joy and peace just being outside. I noticed all kind of things that I don't normally. I spoke to lawn care people, a delivery man, a mail carrier. I enjoyed the neighborhood in a way I never do when driving through it. The whole

experience was a re-charging, uplifting activity. AND I was touched by God, and became aware of my love and gratitude to God—just for being alive.

All time is God's time. God's not whining, demanding that we squeeze him into our schedules, that we FIND TIME for him, FIND TIME to live our faith. God is present in all our time, waiting for us to remember his presence, to discover his power and blessing and challenge.

In the Buddhist tradition there is an expression: "Chop wood; carry water", which is a way of saying that spiritual meaning can be found in the smallest most ordinary functions of the day.

What in your life is "chopping wood" or "carrying water"? Can you discover God in times when:

- you are involved in a tense interaction among co-workers?
- you are answering the same question for the 10th time in a class of 5th graders?
- you are trying to cook dinner, supervise a homework session, and consult with a colleague on the phone all at the same time?
- you are trying valiantly to find the bottom of your "in" box?
- you are mowing the lawn, getting the oil changed on the car, returning books to the library?

Can you meet God stretched out in the hammock in the warmth of a summer afternoon?

Our Bible text for today from Mark's gospel might at first seem to contradict what I've been saying. Jesus, whose ministry, as we learned last Sunday, was a huge success at this point, decided to take the disciples off to a secluded place to rest. His followers had returned to Jesus from a time of doing his work. They were enthusiastic, excited, bubbling over wanting to tell Jesus all they had done and taught. In the middle of all the hubbub Jesus proposed they "come away to a deserted place" to rest a while.

It might seem Jesus was advocating a kind of "time off" from doing God's mission for his disciples. But there are two messages in this text. First, Jesus reminds his followers they must allow time for recharging their spiritual batteries and for resting their physical bodies. **BUT THIS IS ALSO GOD'S TIME! THIS IS ALSO DOING GOD'S MISSION!**

Second, this text reveals that even our “time off” is God’s time. When Jesus and his followers get to what had been a secluded place, it is no longer. The people anticipated their movements, and got there first. They call out to Jesus in their need. Christ responds to them with compassion, delaying the time to rest to a later moment.

This biblical perspective teaches us that sometimes we do have to care for ourselves, so we can continue to do God’s work with renewed energy and refined vision. But allowing our engines to idle for a while is different than shutting them down completely. If we are clear we are not “making time for God”, but see all time as God’s time, we will be prepared to be surprised by God even when we are at rest.

The disciples thought they were escaping to a deserted place with Jesus, but instead they had a short, restful boat trip and then witnessed Jesus feeding the 5,000 plus hungry people and Christ walking on water. Which experience left the disciples more rested and refreshed in spirit? God was present in both their time of rest and in their being “rev’ed-up”.

Think of this example, which I’ll bet everyone here has experienced. You come home so exhausted, all you want to do is sit in front of the TV and veg out. You’re so tired you can’t even concentrate. You don’t end up watching anything actually, but channel surf from one program to another. After an hour or more of this, you are even more depleted, and can barely toss the remote and stagger off to bed.

Are you busy trying to squeeze in a few more summer activities before the season ends? Don’t try to FIND TIME for God. Recognize that God is already in all the time you have. It is that recognition that makes all the difference in the world.

So, our job this summer? Recognize and Remember! All time is God’s time. We can help each other with this—I might need you to remind me of this now and then. We can remind each other! Recognize and Remember, God is in all of our time. Amen. Amen.