

Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56

Just in case you didn't know, I'm not a pastor. I don't even pretend to be one. I'm a camp director at an 80 year-old Lutheran camp. Nawakwa is a wonderful place, and I love the work that I do there, but it's not exactly what you might call a "normal job."

Lots of people think that I only work three months out of the year and my days consist of making lanyards, singing Kum Ba Yah, and eating s'mores. That's not true. I bet I haven't sung Kum Ba Yah in over twenty years. I work year-round, but the summers are particularly intense. Campers arrive each Sunday afternoon and they leave the next Saturday morning. My work day runs from about 7 a.m. to about 10 p.m., but I am on call 24 hours a day. My staff has 28 hours off each weekend; I usually manage about 18 and that includes sleeping time. So, no, I don't come home on weekends. I'm usually lucky to make it here just in time for the band's 9 o'clock rehearsal on Sunday morning. For eleven weeks each summer, I have little to no downtime.

Last Saturday was somewhat busier than normal, but not all that much out of the ordinary. John had taken the boys home from camp so that they could stare at the television all day, and he, as you are well aware, had to preside at the 5:30 Saturday Night Worship service. I had full list of things to do, some personal, some work-related. I had to go to the grocery store to pick up Pepto-Bismal for the camp infirmary, pita bread for camp worship, and pretzels for the camp director. We were also out of communion wine and thermometer covers, so I had at least three stops to make. In addition, I also had to fulfill my solemn vow to myself to consume at least one Dairy Queen Blizzard each weekend of the summer. This all needed to be accomplished before 2 o'clock, because St. Matthew, York was holding their congregational picnic at Nawakwa and they needed a lifeguard (that's me!) from 2-4. There was still ANOTHER group arriving at camp that evening (stopping over on their way to a work camp in West Virginia) and I not only needed to greet them when they arrived, but I also had to get up and serve them breakfast on Sunday morning BEFORE leaving camp at 8 in order to be here at 9 for rehearsal. There were loose ends to tie up before the Family Campers arrived on Sunday afternoon, and my laundry from the week was becoming rather pungent. The dog needed a bath; I needed a bath; I also needed a nap, but I knew that there was definitely not time for that.

I finished my shopping and returned to camp at 1:40 and made it to the pool by 2. As I was unlocking the pool gate, one of the members of St. Matthew called over to me, "Are you our lifeguard?" *Yup. Sure am.* "Aren't you lucky?" *Yup... I sure am.* (But I wasn't feeling lucky; I was feeling cranky.) Around 3 o'clock, the thunder started to rumble, and in a deep, dark place inside of me, I began to smile because I knew that God was granting me a reprieve from lifeguarding the entire two hours AND God was also granting me time to take that nap. I WAS lucky, after all!

I whistled everyone out of the pool and was locking up the gate when a Lincoln Town Car with New York plates slowly pulled into camp and stopped. My heart sank. I recognized this behavior. It was a carload of tourists – not people visiting the Gettysburg Battlefields or the

Adams County orchards, but someone who went to Nawakwa years ago and decided to drive through and see if the old place was still in operation. (We are, by the way.) This happens several times throughout the year, especially in the summer, and most of the time, these are very nice visits. Occasionally, however, we encounter someone who feels the need to lament the loss of the old latrines, or to scoff upon learning that we don't allow campers to drink untreated spring water, or to make disparaging comments about how "kids today have it so easy" and that Nawakwa "seems more like a hotel than a summer camp." In any case, I knew that there was now no chance of taking that much-needed nap. I was not, as it turned out, lucky after all.

I walked over to the car with my pasted-on smile. The woman in the front passenger seat rolled down her window and I introduced myself (Hello, I'm Marianne, the camp director, can I help you?) "We have three former campers in here and we wanted to see if the old place was still in operation." "Yeah, I know..." I was thinking to myself, but what I really said was, "Great! Why don't you pull around to the office and I'll meet you there!"

When I got to the office, an older gentleman, about four and a half feet tall, hoisted himself out of the back seat, looked me directly in the eye and said, "Marianne, do you still sell candy bars for a nickel in the camp store?" (Here we go, I thought.) "No sir, we don't. In fact we don't sell any candy in the store at all. We give the kids dessert at every meal and they get ice cream twice a week."

"Ice cream, TWICE A WEEK?!? That's TERRIFIC!! And you give it away? How wonderful!!"

He went on to tell me that when he first came to camp, it cost him twelve dollars a week... because his first week at Nawakwa was in 1930... and if you can't do the math, that was 79 years ago! I was astonished. I couldn't help myself. "How old *are* you?" I asked.

"I'm 91 years old!" he said proudly.

At this point his wife spoke up and corrected him gently, "You're only 90. You'll be 91 on *Tuesday*, Art."

"Yes, of course," Art said.

Art and his lovely wife Louisa, and their son John had each been campers at Nawakwa, and on this particular Saturday, each had a hankering to come back and visit a place that had been formative for them. And on this particular Saturday afternoon, God granted me the privilege of eavesdropping on their memories. They took time to walk around (the thunder had stopped), we looked at old camp pictures together, and they took many new photographs of their own. Art shared some of his favorite memories of bugle reveilles (we don't do that anymore) and one toilet for 15 cabins (we have one in each cabin now) and speculated that, if he wasn't the oldest living Nawakwa alumnus, he was at least the oldest one to visit on this particular Saturday (he sure was).

It turned out to be a wonderful visit and I was a little bit sad when they said it was time to leave. We took time for one last photograph of the former campers and the current director. Art encouraged me to move in close to him, but not to make a big show of it because his wife was rather jealous (I could see why). They each thanked me for taking time to visit with them. They expressed their gratitude for my generous hospitality (oh, if only they knew) and once again told me how important Nawakwa had been to each of them, and how delighted they were to know that its strong ministry continues. And then they were off.

And, oddly enough, I no longer had need of that nap.

This brief visit was the very dope slap I needed to remind me that the work we do at Nawakwa do is holy work. We create a community where people can be apart from the world. We offer daily opportunities for prayer and worship. We provide space for quiet retreat and space for nourishing conversation. People come to Nawakwa to recharge their batteries. Thousands of people have discerned God's call at Nawakwa. To be called to be part of this ministry is a gift. To be cranky about missing my nap and my DQ Blizzard was just plain selfish.

I could hardly wait for Staff Meeting the next day so that I could tell the staff about Art and Louisa and to remind all of us that in 2088, maybe one of this week's campers will pull into the parking lot in a hovercraft, just checking to see if the old place is still in operation. And perhaps they will remember Nawakwa as a place where they learned to be quiet with God, and how to live in Christian community, and that we used to GIVE ice cream away!

Today's Gospel lesson begins with the disciples meeting with Jesus, all charged up about the good work that they had been doing in the towns and villages. They were excited to tell him about the sermons they had preached, evil spirits with whom that had grappled, and people with diseases whom they had healed. I highly doubt that they sang Kum Ba Yah or made a s'more, but the way Mark tells the story, it sounds like the disciples' mission work was at least as intense as a week at summer camp.

I can imagine Jesus, the Good Shepherd and Master who he is, looking at his disciples and delighting in their excitement for their work. I can also clearly imagine Jesus recognizing that his disciples needed time to rest and recharge. There was no way they could continue to keep up the pace at which they had been going.

The next few lines of the Gospel convey two messages – not a mixed message, but two halves of one truth. Jesus tells the twelve to go away to a deserted place and rest, and from this we learn that we, too, need to take time to recharge spiritually and rest physically. What *happens* next teaches us that we also need to be prepared to be surprised by God. In the 19 verses that have been omitted in today's lesson, the disciples witness Jesus feeding the 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fishes and later walking on water, which are impressive surprises by any standard. Jesus takes his disciples away from their daily work and responsibilities, but Jesus also shows them that God continues to do God's work even as they are resting!

One might be tempted to say that our downtime is God's uptime, meaning that God often speaks to us (or perhaps that we are best able to hear God speaking) in our quiet times, and that's true

for many of us. A great challenge of the Christian life, however, is not separating “God Time” from “Our Time,” but rather living always in “God’s Time.”

When we live fully in Christ, as though our bodies are a dwelling place for God’s Spirit, we are freed of finding time for God. All our time is God’s time. In everything we do, we hear God. Our every action, large or small, serves God and glorifies God.

God surprises us, as God surprised the disciples, by showing up in our lives at the most unlikely times and in the most unlikely people. When we retreat to a deserted place, physically or in our minds, God finds us. When we become wrapped up in our own crankiness or selfishness, God reminds us that we are not the center of the universe. When we walk through the valley of death, slogging through the darkest moments of our lives, God sends Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who gently leads us home.

In these weeks of summer, I certainly pray that you will find time to rest and recharge, as Jesus taught the twelve... and that’s not a plug for Nawakwa – I know camp is not relaxing for everyone! In whatever way you find to recharge your spiritual batteries, be prepared for God to surprise you, because no matter how busy your life or my life might be, God is ever so much more busy, because, after all, God doesn’t have, or even need, any downtime.

And thanks be to God for that!