



THE JESUS SPA

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The author of the Chronicles of Narnia, C.S. Lewis, died in 1963. Lewis was famous not just for the Chronicles, but also for the broad range of books on Christianity he had written over the years, as well as his space trilogy and other works. His influence is still felt, especially now that the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe has become Disney's biggest grossing live action film of all time.

He's been a best-loved author for decades. So you would think that his death would have been widely mourned. As it turned out, it was hardly noticed at all. Because C.S. Lewis happened to die on November 22nd, 1963, which was of course the same day President Kennedy was assassinated. That was the big, sensational news that rocked the world and overwhelmed all the other news of the day. C.S. Lewis became a second page story – important, but harder to find.

In our study of Mark, this morning we're coming to one of the most famous miracles Jesus performed. It was the sensational news of the day, and it got major press coverage, being the only miracle recorded for us in all four of the gospels – Jesus feeding the 5,000. It's really a remarkable event. But what I want to look at this morning is the second page story from that same day in history. Something was happening at the same time that could go unnoticed. There was a subplot, if you will, just behind the bigger happenings.

It all takes place in the second half of Mark chapter 6. Before we get to it though, we need to set the stage with some background information.

Mark 6:6-7, 12-13

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits... They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

We just did a special send-off prayer for the D'Iberville team this morning, and in many ways, these verses are where the idea comes from. Jesus sent out his team of 12 to get their hands dirty and to extend his ministry reach further than he could go himself. And it turns out to be wildly successful. Who would ever have guessed that some fishermen and tax collectors would have it in them to preach and heal people? But Jesus had given them a new kind of authority, and it worked.

Our story today takes place just as these 12 disciples, or apostles as they're also called, are coming back after their mission with stories from the road.

Mark 6:30-44

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. 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."

You know when kids get home from school and they've had a really exciting day? They can't wait to tell you all about the fire alarm that went off and the special assembly and the good grade they got on their spelling test. And then something happens and they burst into tears, because they're so exhausted. They need a snack and some down time.

It's kind of like that for the disciples. They can't believe the things they did and they're eager to talk about what had happened. But they're also exhausted. And there's a lot of chaos and activity swirling around them. Jesus senses their need and says, "Come on. Let's get out of here."

"Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." Isn't that a great line? Isn't it good to know Jesus said something like that? He is concerned for the well being of his friends. And he knows what they needed more than anything right then was rest.

Life is wearying. Do you find that to be true? When we're worn out, there's nothing we crave more than rest. And by Jesus inviting his disciples to get away, we have permission to do that. It means Jesus approves of us taking care of ourselves. One of my favorite quotes is from John Ortberg, who said, "Perhaps the single most spiritual thing you could do right now is...take a nap."

The disciples needed rest – more than they knew. It wasn't just physical exhaustion that was taking a toll. Jesus recognized some things that were going on with them that were deeper than simply needing sleep.

The disciples had been essentially filling Jesus' shoes. They were performing his job description – preaching, teaching, healing, casting out demons. That was a heavy weight that brought with it two truths. The first is that

Filling Jesus' shoes can be seductive.

Authority of that kind is heady stuff and it can draw you in with its power. Number one, you can see some amazing things. Demons backing down. Diseases being cured. That's pretty dramatic stuff. Number two, working for Jesus is seductive because it can make you feel important when you're having that kind of impact on the world. You can start to view yourself differently. And number three, it can make you feel closer to God because

you're on his team, doing his work out in the world. Your center of value shifts to the activities you're doing.

Working for Jesus can start to take center stage in your thoughts. In a similar situation when Jesus sent his followers out to preach and teach, they came back all fired up that they had been able to cast out evil spirits. Jesus responded to their enthusiasm by saying this:

Luke 10:20

Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

The disciples were losing focus a bit. They needed some time to regroup and get grounded in Jesus again.

We're not all that different. I don't care what the work is – whether it is the simple act of going to church regularly or feeding the homeless or leading a Bible study or being kind to your kids. Whatever it is, we have to remember that Jesus doesn't love us for what we do – he just loves us. We are not a means to an end, simply vehicles for carrying out his mission in the world. He is profoundly interested in us for who we are, not just what we do. And as much as we may enjoy whatever work we find ourselves doing for God, we have to remember that he is the priority over the work.

Henry Blackaby once said, "Most of the time when God calls you or gives a direction, His call is not what He wants you to do for Him. He is telling you what He is about to do where you are."

Doing good things is not the same as connecting with Jesus. Just because we're impacting other people doesn't mean we're still in touch with him on any personal level. Christ sees us in that spot and says, "Come away with me."

The work we do for God can be seductive and end up replacing Christ as the center of our attention. It's exciting and it makes us feel good about ourselves. Those aren't bad things in themselves – just potential dangers that make it healthy to step away from it once in a while to restore a proper perspective. Secondly,

Filling Jesus' shoes exposes our limits.

The disciples had to leave their comfort zone and hit the road for their mission trip. They've discovered that it's exhausting to live out of a suitcase and invest in people. It doesn't take long to realize that even when you're working for Jesus, that doesn't MAKE you Jesus. We can't do it all.

Any time we're taken out of our comfort zones to do something for God it takes it out of us. And we have to recognize our own limitations. We were not created to work endlessly.

Pete Scazzero writes, “The frightening truth is we can sometimes pass through our God-given limits and end up doing God’s work without God.”

He goes on to describe some of those God-given limits.

Personality – some of us are more energized by hanging out with a crowd, while others recharge by being alone. Some people thrive on creative chaos while other people need control and order to feel at peace. Are we putting pressure on ourselves to do something at odds with our basic make up or temperament?

Season of life – The stage you are at determines what you can or can’t do. When each of our kids hit 18 months, Karin and I swore off restaurants for a season, because it wasn’t worth the headaches and embarrassment to try to eat out. And that was okay for that stage. There will be different times in your life when you don’t have to feel pressure to do what you’ve always done for God, because you’re in a different spot. And that’s OKAY.

Your past – Where you’ve come from can and should be taken into account. Deal honestly with your own history as you look at what you want to take on in the future.

Negative emotions – What brings out the anger, depression or rage in you? That might be a signal of a need for rest in one particular area of your life.

You get the picture. We all have built in flags that wave in our hearts and minds and say, “I think that’s enough.” Many times we try to tear down and stomp on those flags, to push past our limits. But God gave them to us for a reason. A great verse about how God knows our limits is from Psalm 103:

Psalm 103:13-14

The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he understands how weak we are; he knows we are only dust.

Jesus saw the struggle his disciples were facing as they discovered that working for him could be seductive and exposed their own limits. He knew how much they needed to get away from it for a moment.

But they needed more than an escape. What they needed more than anything was to reconnect with Jesus as the source of strength for their work. Look at his words again:

“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

The word that is translated as “quiet place” is really the word for “wilderness” or “desert.” Come to the wilderness for a rest. Sure. Hadn’t Jesus just gone through his temptation in the wilderness? Hadn’t the Israelites wandered around for years in the wilderness? How is that a restful place?

There could only be one point in going to someplace so empty with Jesus, and that would be to go someplace that's empty of everything BUT Jesus. A place with no other resources, no other draw except him. Jesus takes his disciples into the desert to rediscover the joy of being with him and only him.

So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.

Have I mentioned yet that we're going to Hawaii tomorrow? I have to admit – I did feel a small pang of guilt that it happened to fall on the same week we're sending people to go work in Mississippi. But only a small pang. This is the trip that my former employers gave me as a going away gift when I left there in July. It was incredibly generous and we're so grateful.

This is really the first long vacation we've gone on as a family that's just us. No going to visit relatives this time. And Karin has been fiercely protective of it. When my sister called to say, "Wouldn't it be fun if we flew over and spent the week with you there?" Karin said, "No thanks." When our friends from California said, "We're going to Hawaii too! Maybe we'll go at the same time!" Karin said, "No thanks." Sometimes you just need to be by yourselves.

I'm sure that the disciples were looking forward to getting to that spot where it would be just them and Jesus. No more distractions or people competing for his attention. Even though the destination was a wasteland, they would at least be able to collect their thoughts and have some peace and quiet.

So as they get closer to shore and can see that their dream of solitude isn't going to happen, they must have felt like they were being robbed. What happened to the rest Jesus had promised them? Not only that – they were starving, because things had been so chaotic Mark says they hadn't even had time to eat. They are depleted and the last thing they wanted was to spend the day with needy people.

The moment seems lost. If you read ahead you see that they never did get that time alone. There was no reprieve coming any time soon. It makes you wonder: was Jesus just giving lip service to the idea of rest for them? Did his plan for a leadership retreat fail? Was it just a tease?

Although this certainly wasn't the break anyone was expecting, I believe Jesus still managed to give his disciples the gift of rest. It looked completely different than they were expecting, but it was still there.

The dictionary defines rest as "the act or state of ceasing from work. Refreshment." Given that definition, is it possible for the disciples to find rest in the middle of the crowds? Did they cease any kind of work? Can they leave feeling refreshed?

Although the disciples don't recognize it, Jesus takes them to a kind of spa for the soul. They may not get away from pressures but they still have an opportunity to recharge.

We too can have that rest in the wilderness. Even when the chaos around us won't subside, we can visit the Jesus spa, a place of spiritual invigoration. Paul discovered that place. He wrote,

2 Corinthians 4:16

Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

That renewal is available to us. Let's look at how things unfolded for the disciples that day.

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

What's up first in our day at the spa? It begins with some

Gut Crunches

The Greek word for compassion is a very picturesque word. The Greeks believed that the seat of emotions was in the guts. It makes sense, since whenever we're anxious or excited we get those butterflies in the stomach. So as Jesus sees the crowd, Mark describes him as having this visceral, gut-level reaction to them. He is moved with compassion in his insides, and that is why he responds to them the way he does.

The disciples see firsthand what motivates Jesus in his work. It's not the power, it's not the sense of accomplishment – it's seeing the true plight of people and just how desperate their need is.

What drives us in what we do? Pride? Ambition? Guilt? I hate to admit it, but compassion isn't usually top on my list of motivations. Too often when I'm trying to meet a deadline or complete a task, I just see people as being in my way. They seem like a distraction, when they're what God cares about the most.

Randy Alcorn says, *If I've rested in Him quietly – and for me, only then – I have this reservoir of strength and perspective that allows me to regard interruptions as divine appointments.*

I want some of that – to see interruptions as divine appointments. Our perspective changes when we get back to the compassion Jesus feels.

When Karin was a senior in high school, her family took a trip to Cameroon to visit her aunt Ruby. Her brother Jon was 16 at the time, and a little too cool for the whole thing. The plane ride to Africa had left him tired and cranky, so he wasn't very enthusiastic

when he heard that one of the first things they were going to do was go visit a leper colony.

He just wanted to be left alone and sleep. He didn't want to go see a bunch of poor, sick people with missing body parts. It sounded disgusting and boring. So he was in a bad mood as they drove over the bumpy dirt roads to get there.

The lepers were not contagious, but they were not able to function very well in society. So they lived together in this colony, selling sugar cane to bring in a little bit of money. When Karin's family arrived for their visit, wouldn't you know it – one of the lepers singled out Jon and walked up to him. The man couldn't speak, but he smiled a huge smile and handed Jon the most valuable gift he could -- a piece of sugar cane. Jon had no money or anything to give back to the man. He couldn't even say "thank you" in words the man could understand.

In an instant Jon's attitude melted away. He completely lost it and sobbed uncontrollably. His heart was filled with compassion for this man, and all his fatigue and complaining melted away. It was a pivotal moment for him that marked when he first decided to become a doctor.

I see compassion as a good starting point for rest, because it changes my motivation and my focus. It frees me from being so driven, and points me to the heart of Jesus.

Mark tells us that since Jesus felt compassion for the people, he taught them many things. But as the day wore on, the disciples could see that compassion was going to need to take a different form.

By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

But he answered, "You give them something to eat."

If you go to a typical day spa, they might offer aromatherapy as a treatment option. Supposedly smell can have a powerful, relaxing effect. In the Jesus Spa, the disciples get

Sound Therapy

Jesus begins to get to their heart through their ears. The disciples look around and see this big crowd. Maybe they noticed a few growling stomachs. So this need is looming large in their minds. Something has to be done. They go to Jesus to point out what they're sure he's unaware of, and Jesus throws it right back at them. "You give them something to eat." His response is an invitation to get involved, and at the same time is intended to force them to admit there's not much they can do.

Sometimes, what looks like a need is really a calling. We say, “God how can this happen? It’s terrible!” And God says back, “What can you do about this?”

The disciples had to hear what Christ was telling them. They had to discover their own level of responsibility to the need. They had to get to a point of recognizing both that this was beyond them and that Jesus still had something he wanted them to do. He pulls them in and puts them to work. But it is in a supporting role. They are not asked to make the miracle happen – Jesus gives them jobs that just require faith that he knows what he’s doing.

This is why this idea of sound therapy is part of rest. We listen not just to hear what we’re supposed to do, but also what we’re not responsible for. Our calling is not to fix the world. It’s more of a calling to recognize we can’t, and to walk in trust with the one who can.

It’s equally important to note that Jesus didn’t take this approach every time there was a crisis: In the big storm, he didn’t tell his disciples, “You talk to the wind, I’ll take the waves.” When he had to raise a dead girl back to life, he didn’t tell her dad to try first. Not every need has our name written on it.

That raises the question, how do we know? There are so many needs. How do we hear the sound of Jesus calling us when there are so many people asking for help?

That’s a sermon in itself, but we can see some clues in this story. First, the disciples identified strongly with the need. Mark has already told us that they hadn’t eaten. Maybe the hunger of the crowd resonates with them because they’re so hungry themselves. Christ will often tap us on the shoulder through a personal connection. When we relate to someone else’s pain or crisis, when we’ve been through something similar ourselves, God can use that to tell us he has a role for us to play.

Secondly, Jesus asked the disciples to take inventory of what had already been supplied in the way of a solution.

They said to him, "That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"

"How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see."

When they found out, they said, "Five -- and two fish."

They didn’t have much. Technically, they didn’t have anything. Only a little boy had any food. It was the small something God had already provided, the seed Jesus wanted to use to grow his miracle. When we see a need, Christ asks us to look around and see if he has already given us the beginnings of something to meet that need. If he has given us both a personal connection and an inkling of how he might work in the situation, then it could be he is calling us to be involved.

The disciples heard what Jesus was saying, but they couldn't quite believe it. In John's account of this story, he says that Peter's brother Andrew spoke up and said:

John 6:9

Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?

The next thing to learn in resting with Jesus is

Grip Relaxation

The disciples were extremely skeptical that Jesus could actually do anything with the loaves and fish. How far will they go? Really, it was ridiculous. It was such a small amount. It would be like filling Cheney stadium with people, then taking one box of Lunchables and passing it around. If Jesus wanted to do a miracle, why not just create a meal out of nothing? Why bother with a boy's snack pack?

Eventually, though, the loaves and fish were given to Jesus.

Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.

We all have loaves and fish – things we think would be unusable by Jesus. We hold them tightly, not so much because we're selfish, but because we really can't see that Christ can do anything with them. Whether it is a talent, a past experience, money. We're like Andrew saying, "How far can that go?"

It sounds like we're being humble, but deep down it's really pride. We'd rather not be exposed for how little we have to offer. So we hang on tightly to our dignity and refuse to give up what we think he could never want. Jesus wants to relax our grip, to help us see that it really has nothing to do with how great our gift is. The miracle is what he can do with the least likely things when we're willing to let go of them.

If you only hear one sentence today this is it: Rest in Jesus comes when we realize that we're the desert. We're the empty place with nothing to offer. We strain and struggle in life thinking we've got to give something great to God and other people, when the whole time he's the only source of it all. We've got to run to him and give him our meager offerings to use as he sees fit.

Small things are only small until they've been broken. The loaves had nothing to offer until they were broken in Christ's hands and made usable.

And that's where the mystery of salvation shines the most clearly. Jesus could have fed the crowd without the loaves and fish, just like he could have saved the world without dying on the cross. We look and see a man executed by Romans and say, "How far can that go to save the world? One person for the sins of everybody?" But then he was broken, and the miracle happened. God multiplied that death to give life to everyone.

God is in the business of working with what looks small and doing the impossible.

Mark writes and says

They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

They all ate and were satisfied. In Mark's typical, understated way, he speaks volumes. Jesus satisfies. He accomplished the impossible, making a way out of no way. When he's all we've got in the middle of nowhere, he's more than enough.

Mark tells us the disciples picked up 12 baskets of leftovers. When Jesus steps in, he doesn't barely meet the need. He exceeds it.

Are you needing rest this morning? Are you worn out? Christ invites you to come away with him and recharge.

Am I operating out of compassion?

Where do I hear him calling me?

What have I been gripping too tightly?

When we say "Okay, God. I let go. You can have what I've been holding back," he takes it and makes it into something that not only is useful, but that shows the world who he is. This is the God who makes something out of nothing. This is the God who fills the hungry with good things. This is the God who gives rest in the wilderness.