

Sermon ✝ July 18, 2021

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

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I don't suppose you've thought much about this, but it is intriguing . . . ever wonder where Jesus went on vacation? I mean it. Where did Jesus vacation?

There were, I am sure, all kinds of possibilities. He liked the out-of-doors and so maybe he and a couple of friends would go backpacking on Mt. Carmel. Or perhaps he spent his holidays at some resort along the Mediterranean coast in let's say, Joppa or Caesarea. He could relax on the beach by day, check out a few boutiques in the late afternoon and then end the day with dinner at one of the fine restaurants found along the coast. Or perhaps Jesus had a good friend who would loan him his time-share condo on the Sea of Galilee.

Does this all sound preposterous? Jesus on vacation . . . are you kidding? Well, I am kidding a little bit, but I am also serious. And so was Jesus serious when he went to a deserted place by himself.

While Americans have been vacationing for scarcely more than a couple of generations, Jesus was aware of what is equivalent to a modern vacation. During his last summer, he retired four times from the hot, sultry shores of the Sea of Galilee. He withdrew once to the desert, once to the seashore, and twice to the mountains.

If, during that summer, someone should have observed, "I haven't seen Jesus around much this summer." I can imagine someone responding: "Why, didn't you know, Jesus is on vacation." There was some real sense in which he was.

The purpose of this sermon is not to say that we should pattern our vacations after Jesus, although the seashore and mountains are not bad places for vacationing. Rather, I want to look at some of the experiences that occurred during his retreats which can apply to our lives whether or not we are on vacation. We need vacations or, at least, we need withdrawal.

Considering the nearly 250 years of the existence of America, vacations are a rather new notion. Early on, vacations were only for the wealthy. Vacations, as we think of them, have only become popular in just the last 60 years or so.

And then . . . we've got this "work ethic" thing in this country which means that many do not even use all of their vacation time. Because there are some who think that it looks bad to take all of their allotted vacation. And other people just plain don't know what to do if they're not at work.

In much of Europe, all workers get 4 to 6 weeks off. I wonder how many of the problems we face as a nation could be solved if more people spent more time on vacation. We need the discipline of withdrawal. Unfortunately, most Americans are better at returning than withdrawing often driven by compulsive ambition.

Of course, there are benefits of vacation withdrawal. We need the rest that withdrawal makes possible. Jesus suggested the first retreat of summer: "Come with me, by yourselves, to some lonely place where you can rest quietly." We need rest. We need the renewal that new places, new faces, and new experiences give.

We need the distance and perspective that withdrawal makes possible. It is by backing away from life that we are able to see it more completely and grasp it more wholly. Distance can often make even our biggest problems seem not all that great.

We need the opportunity for reflection, meditation, introspection and self evaluation that withdrawal gives. Away from the busy life, the demanding tasks, and the hurrying crowds, we can ask: "Who am I?" "What is the real purpose of my life?" "What are the enduring values?" "How does my life fit into god's plan for me?"

There comes a time to "draw apart", away from the pressures of everyday encounters, the noise of the crowd, the emotional demands, and the other things that deny us counsel with ourselves.

We need time to think. Someone has defined modern life in three words: "hurry-worry-bury". It is like the senator who was asked as he rushed breathlessly through a group of reporters, "What do you think of the present world crisis?" Without looking back, he replied: "Don't bother me now I'm in a hurry to make a speech. A crisis like this is no time to think."

We need to find those lonely places where we can rest quietly. Take the time. We may not all be able to afford a world cruise, but we can afford an afternoon in a state park or a zoo or on quiet stretch of beach.

Don't allow your schedules to totally dictate your life . . . you are in charge. And don't get caught up in that nonsense about thinking that a really good employee doesn't take vacation.

It is also important to return. We cannot withdraw forever. There is work to be done, duties to be performed, friendship to be given and service to be rendered. The devotional and religious life is not to be taken out of the secular and the meditative and reflective life is not to be set over against the busy world. We need a balance. Withdrawal and return are so vital because they are a pattern set within a basic rhythm of life.

So where did Jesus vacation? The gospels give us some clues, but not specifics. And no, Jesus probably did not vacation at Club Med. He did, however, realize the importance of withdrawal.

So let us, with love and devotion, follow Jesus as he leads us into quiet places of rest and renewal and back into the busy world again. In doing so, we shall be saved and help our world to be restored to the God who created and loves it. Amen.