**Trinity 7: Mark 6:30-34, 53-end**

I’ve never understood those people who say they’re so busy that they forgot to eat! My Mother-in-Law is one of these people: she wouldn’t have much for lunch at the best of times, but she can become so preoccupied in what she’s doing that she forgets mealtimes entirely!! This makes no sense to me, as someone who would base my entire day around food if I could! And I’ve been encouraged to see that Jos has clearly inherited this gift from me too!

But here we have the disciples, in our gospel reading, so busy in their ministry that they hadn’t even had time to eat! It says the apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. Like an enthusiastic reception class who have just returned from a school trip. So, Jesus gently encourages them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.”

And in many ways this reflects the rhythm of Christian life. God calls us and sends us out, to be his hands and his feet in the world, to serve him in acts of love and kindness. But we are kidding ourselves if we think we can do all this in our own strength. Purely through our own effort and endeavour.

Here Jesus’ reminds his disciples of the need to slow down, to stop, and rest in God’s presence. Only if we allow ourselves to spend time in the fire of God’s love, to rekindle that same love within us, are we able to burn brightly and radiate Christ’s light in the world.

But we know this is hard to do in a culture where busy-ness and relentless work ethic are greatly celebrated. This warped understanding of the American Dream– that I can do and be anything I want to be, just so long as I am just willing to work hard enough at it!

Yesterday I was at the wedding yesterday of my former university rowing coach. A lot of people there had been coached by him over the years and one of the things we all valued in Dan was his emphasis on mindset and mentality. To instill in us a willingness to work harder than any other crews. And one of the main attractions of rowing is that there’s a fairly direct correlation between how much you put in and how much you get back from it. The harder you train the faster you go, the more you win.

Of course, it can be pretty gruelling at times, but you know that if you are willing to spend the time in the gym and on the water, if you are willing to suffer more than your opponents, then you will generally beat them. (It’s not the lottery of penalty shootouts!)

And this worked quite well for a time, until I had moved to Melbourne and it came to the summer holiday at university. And rather than go travelling with my friends I decided to stay around in Melbourne so that I could continue to train and row, aiming towards the Australian Nationals, which were at the end of the summer. Yet a week before Nationals as I was cycling down into the city, a car cut me up, turning across the cycle lane, and I ended up rolling onto my shoulder. I knew almost straight away that my shoulder was damaged, and that I wouldn’t have time to recover to row in time. I was devastated. And in some ways it was a small nudge in returning to my faith. A wake-up call that I couldn’t guarantee my own success in life. I couldn’t create my own happiness simply through my own hard work.

Around this time of year, in 1940 the first prisoners arrived in Auschwitz. As they arrived, they were greeted by the twisted proverb inscribed above the gates “Arbeit mach frei” (work sets you free). This wasn’t meant in *cruel irony*, nor a *false promise* that those who were worked to exhaustion would be set free, though it was both cruel irony and false promise. Rather it was intended by the Nazi’s as a sincere mystical belief that self-sacrifice in the form of endless labour would lead to a form of spiritual liberation!

And we might think this horrendous and deeply misguided. But how many of us in our own lives still hold onto this false belief, that if we just work harder, if we just strive more, we will finally be free. We will finally arrive– through that promotion, through getting more money, status, power. If we just work harder, then we’ll finally be free.

And so with God, if we just work harder- then we will believe ourselves worthy of God’s love. If we are just nicer, kinder, lovelier… then we will be more loveable. But to this Jesus says stop. Come away. Rest awhile in the gracious presence of God, where you will discover yourselves already loved and valued beyond anything you could have ever imagined. And this is the security, the bedrock of God’s eternal love, from which we are sustained to work and strive. Not to earn God’s love, but *to discover we are already loved beyond our wildest imagination*.

Certainly, resilience and tenacity are things required in the Christian life too– and none of us can be a disciple of Jesus without that willingness to keep going, even when things are really tough. Though we are held by God’s love, this is a love that beckons our *response*.

And perhaps in the mass crowds clawing after Jesus, chasing him around the hillside to meet him when the boat next comes to shore, we see a glimpse of the other side of this imbalance. People who are desperate to *get something* *from* Jesus, to treat him as a magician. May God keep us from seeing our relationship with him as something to meet our needs, as something to be put to our use.

But, before we move to quickly to dismiss the great crowds chasing after Jesus, we should recognise his response. It’s not, as we might imagine, exasperation– can’t I get any peace around here! No, his response is *compassion*. And I think this is because in the crowds we see something we need to grasp ourselves if we are ever to fully rest in Christ’s presence. That is, they see that *Jesus can give them something that the world cannot give.* They see that Jesus can provide for them in a way that they cannot provide for themselves. A security, peace, health, which can only come from outside of themselves. They know clearly their own utter and desperate need for Jesus.

This is why Jesus takes pity on them: For they were like a sheep without a shepherd- defenceless, unguarded, they knew their own lack of protection. They knew their dependence on him.

And so too we only know true rest and the peace of God that passes all understanding when we discover our utter need for his grace. When we grasp that we cannot do it all by ourselves. Only when we learn to lay down our burdens, to uncurl our tightly clasped fingers around all we think we cannot possibly let go off, all we think we cannot entrust to God. Only then do we have open hands enough to receive all that God has for us.

Amen.