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## Listen to Rest

*Homily by Lisa Wiens Heinsohn given for the people of St. John's Episcopal Church  
Isaiah 55:1-5; Matthew 14:13-21; August 2, 2020*

In the name of the Triune God, who calls each person Beloved. **Amen.**

The very first thing I did my first year in college was participate in a wilderness program in which myself and 21 other 18 year olds, plus a few seniors and some other adults, backpacked for three weeks in the Uinta Mountains in Utah. For three weeks we didn't see a sign of humanity except each other and the very slight trails we were on. No buildings, no roads or cars, no telephone poles or wires, no water towers, no planes even. We carried everything we needed on our backs and walked many miles up and over peaks and through the mountains. We slept under tarps and experienced sun and rain and snow. We were above the tree line a lot of the time. It was a wild and wonderful and very challenging program. My back hurt a lot. My legs got really strong.

I've never been a big eater. But I will tell you, by the end of that program, I could seriously eat. I remember on the road trip back to my college from Utah, we had stopped at a grocery store to buy stuff to make burritos. We were at a picnic table with all the food spread out on it, and it quickly

became apparent that we were going to run out of food before people were done eating. And it became something like a scene from Lord of the Flies. I remember stuffing myself as quickly as I could so I could get up to eat another burrito before they all ran out. I think I ate at least three burritos. We were all like that. We had been challenging our bodies extensively and consistently and our appetites showed it.

What we've been going through as a community feels a little like this to me. The terrain around us is really different. We've been doing this really beautiful and good and important work, deeply exploring how Jesus calls us to love in a way that addresses racism, that is so challenging. How are you doing? Some of you have found this work to be really rich and satisfying. Many of you, I know, are just exhausted. I know we're all dealing with a lot, even if there wasn't a pandemic and even if we weren't trying to address racism in a profoundly different way, from a place of Spirit and faith. So I want to invite us, as a congregation, to a Sabbath. To a pause, a rest. This is one of the seven practices of the Way of Love, remember? It's actually a spiritual practice to pause, to rest, to be nourished by the delight and presence of God.

In the gospel reading from today, Jesus had gone on a boat to a deserted place all by himself. I don't know if he was an extrovert or an introvert but I can imagine even the most loving extrovert in the world needing some alone time with the amount of compassion and healing flowing from and

through him all the time. But at this particular time in Jesus' life he especially needed it. He had been going all over the country healing the sick and teaching a beautiful and radical new way of surrender to the life of God. And then he went to his home town, and they couldn't believe it. The scripture says he couldn't do many deeds of power there, because they couldn't see him, couldn't believe him. And right after that, his cousin John the Baptist was killed. So even for Jesus and his disciples, all this got to be too much, and so Jesus went to a deserted place to be alone. He took a boat to a spot on the shore of Galilee that he knew to be isolated.

But when his boat came to shore, he saw huge crowds of people who had heard where he was going and went by foot to get there ahead of him. And here's the thing. His boat was approaching the shore and instead of being alone, he realized he was with all these people. And the gospel says he felt something. But it wasn't overwhelm. It wasn't resentment. It was compassion. In another version of this story it says he felt compassion because he saw that they were like sheep without a shepherd. They needed hope, and healing. So he cured their sick. Then it got to be evening and the disciples told him they should go get some food somewhere. It was a completely reasonable suggestion, even a considerate one. But Jesus just said, I know we are tired. But I want you to feed them. They had absolutely no way to do this. The only food they had wasn't even enough to feed the 13 of them, the disciples and Jesus, let alone 5,000 people. But in the hands and vision of Jesus, it was enough. It wasn't just

enough. There were twelve basketfuls left over, a basket for each disciple.

We are hungry. We are tired. We are in need of nourishment of our bodies and our spirits. And the steady diet we get in the world is often not nourishing. Listening to the news, listening to your relatives, listening to the chatter in our own heads, there is a deep need for peace, for healing spaces, for bread. We are struggling trying to figure out if our children will be in school in person, partly in person, or totally online, and what that means for them physically and socially and what it means for us and our work and paying the rent or the mortgage and putting food on the table. We are hearing a president who tweets about changing the election date and wondering if any of the things we normally enjoy will ever come back. We have all the challenges of our personal lives in family and in work. But more than that, we have undertaken a special journey together, a journey of reconciliation on the road to God's great Shalom, to the Beloved Community. We are listening, learning, lamenting, repenting, committing and discerning.

So now is the time to rest into the presence of God in Christ. Now is the time to receive that which is truly nourishing. In today's reading, the prophet Isaiah asks us this: "Why do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? . . . Come to me, you who are thirsty; you who have no money, come, buy and eat!" What the prophet says feeds people is listening—but not just any

listening. Listening to God. We sure do listen a lot to everything else. The chaos and the noise and the fear and the division. But underneath that chaos, there is a place of rest that nothing can touch. Underneath the division, there is a place of communion where the bread of Jesus' presence will not ever run out. Beyond the arguing voices, there is the voice of God, still speaking words of hope and healing and a vision of the future that is about life and resurrection and a saving justice in which all are made whole.

I'd like to invite you this week to take the PDF bulletin from today's service, and read the beautiful words of the prophet Isaiah and of Matthew's Gospel, and make time to rest. To have Sabbath. To receive and surrender to the nourishing and healing presence of God. Don't forget, true "rest" is one of the seven practices of Jesus' Way of Love. Sabbath is part of the very fabric of creation; God created the world in six days, according to the creation poem from Genesis, and then even God rested on the seventh.

We are on a journey that is rigorous and wild and beautiful and very challenging. Our legs and backs are sore and we're getting used to the terrain. Thank you to each one of you for your presence. Thank you for being here. Please sit down on the grass with each other, spiritually speaking. Please receive an abundance of nourishment by listening to the words of God, by listening carefully to the voice of God, and making time to take it in. Care for each other. Let the love of God that is beyond cost or measure surface and overflow through all

of your experience. Listen to God, that you may live. Let us rest. Amen.