

July 19, 2009
Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Finding Balance

Downtime is uptime if it's God's time

It's been three months since we celebrated Easter. It's an even longer time until the seasons of Advent and Christmas return.

It seems that the hot, humid days of summer are the time we set aside not only to get a break from school or take a vacation, but also as a time when we take a little "time off" from God.

Summertime schedules mean that more families are out of town, and Sunday morning attendance significantly withers.

By now the Sunday School is closed and even vacation Bible school is over. It's a bad time of year to schedule important meetings or to make any great future-shaping decisions. (But that is what is before us Monday night).

Everyone, it seems, is ready for a break, a change, a chance for a little well-deserved "personal time." I know I am!

If we are perfectly honest with ourselves, however, we must admit that we have already segmented our lives into "God's time" vs. the "rest of our time."

So much of our day evaporates into grocery shopping, staff meetings, budget-crunching, traffic snarls, refereeing squabbles, ... "environmental science" (a.k.a. housecleaning and yard work), writing reports, keeping coworkers informed, keeping bosses informed, filing reports, ... preparing meals and preparing for tomorrow's onslaught, that we struggle to "find time" for God.

At best, we schedule little time for prayer there, and a scant

hour of "worship" once a week.

The problem with this attitude is that we can't segment life into "God's time" vs. "our time."

Many people don't find time for God. We find God's time in all our time. If we are truly "in Christ," then Christ's Spirit fills us at every moment of our day.

We must make time to find God and serve God.

Christians don't take "time off" from being Christians any more than our hearts can take "time off" from beating.

On a sticky July day, we should be as fully immersed in God's time as we are singing "Silent Night" on Christmas Eve or proclaiming "Christ is Risen" on Easter morning.

In his book *Breakfast at the Victory*, N.Y.U. Professor of Philosophy James Carse writes, "The highest achievement of the spiritual life is within the full embrace of the ordinary.

Our appetite for the big experience -- sudden insight, dazzling vision, heart-stopping ecstasy -- is what hides the true way from us."

It is the extraordinary in the ordinary that can become prayer.

In the Buddhist tradition there is an expression,

"Chop wood; carry water," which is a way of saying that spiritual meaning can be found in the smallest, most ordinary functions of the day.

What daily tasks of yours correspond to a "chop wood; carry water" mindset?

-- Can you recognize God's time while participating in a tense, humorless confrontation between others?

-- Can you recognize God's time while answering the same question for the 10th time from a child?

-- Can you recognize God's time while attempting to prepare dinner, hold a meeting on the phone, keep the baby from slamming fingers in the door, and supervise a youth?

-- Can you recognize God's time while trying valiantly to find the bottom on your "In" box?

-- Can you recognize God's time while you are logged on?

-- Can you recognize God's time while stretching out in the hot summer sun?

At first glance, it may appear that today's gospel lesson depicts Jesus advocating a kind of "time off" from doing God's mission for others.

The disciples had returned from their mission (Mark 6:7-13) bubbling over with enthusiasm, anxious to tell Jesus all they had "done and taught" (v.30).

In the midst of all this hubbub, of all the comings and goings, Jesus suggests that the disciples "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while" (v.31).

But the words and actions of today's text convey two messages -- two halves that combine to create one whole truth.

First, Jesus does remind the disciples that they must allow time for recharging their spiritual batteries and resting their physical bodies.

Second, however, this lesson demonstrates that even our "time off" is God's time. Verse 33 suggests that despite departing from their old environment and responsibilities, Jesus and his disciples were still fully immersed in God's time.

From this biblical perspective, it is clear that sometimes we do have to take care of ourselves, so that we can then continue to live with renewed energy and improved vision.

But allowing our engines to idle for a while is different from completely shutting down all our systems. If we are genuinely "not making time for God," we should be prepared to be surprised by God even when we are at rest.

The disciples thought they were escaping to a "deserted place" with Jesus. Instead, they had a short, restful boat trip

and then witnessed the miracles of Jesus.

Which experience do you think left the disciples more rested and refreshed in spirit? God was present both in their time of rest and in their "revving-up."

Have you ever just settled down with a cup of coffee, a favorite snack and a magazine, all ready to enjoy a little quiet time -- only to have a small visitor show up?

Which leaves you feeling more rested and refreshed: a half-hour reading or a half-hour with someone else?

Ever been so tired that all you wanted to do was zone out in front of the television? Too beat even to concentrate, you don't watch anything but spend all your time channel surfing from one video image to another.

Finally so exhausted all you can do is stagger off to bed.

For people who live always fully immersed in "God's time," moments of rest and relaxation don't constitute "downtime." Rather this is "uptime," the time we take to refresh our spirits and breathe in the presence of the Divine.

Are you busy scheduling your vacation plans this summer? Don't schedule time for God. If you are living a life of faith, God is already in all the time you have.

Summer is not the time to "wind down."

It is our special time to "rev-up" for challenges ahead

"Downtime" is "uptime" if it's God's time.

Amen!

