

Sunday, July 22, 2012: Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Jesus listens patiently to the disciples. Then he tucks them in for a nap.

by [Jennifer Moland-Kovash](#) in the [July 11, 2012](#) issue

In 1991 I attended the ELCA National Youth Gathering in Dallas with thousands of other high school kids from across the country and around the world for worship, service and Bible study. In addition to being fun and exciting, the trip expanded my view of and encounter with the church. I grew up in a small town in northern Minnesota, after all, where I was used to worshipping regularly with about 70 people. So I still get the chills when I remember saying the Lord's Prayer with 27,000 "new friends" and hearing it echo throughout a convention center.

I remember how my parents told others at church about the trip later. They'd say, with an amused smile, that when they picked me up from the bus I didn't stop talking during the two- and-a-half-hour drive home. "And then," they'd add with a dramatic pause (and some relief), "she slept."

Mark tells us about a time when the disciples gave in to their fatigue. "The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves."

Jesus listens patiently to all of them, perhaps interjecting a bit of advice for next time, gently curtailing a more zealous comment and asking some intentional questions so that everyone has a turn at sharing. Then he tucks them in for a nap, saying, "Come away and rest a while."

But many of us would resist Jesus' command to rest. For me, it takes a ten-day road trip by bus combined with a high-energy gathering before I'll agree to "go quietly" and "rest." To my own detriment, I stay up late and get up early if it means talking with friends. I forego naps because I might miss something. When I hear Jesus gently

guide the apostles to rest, I look around frantically at all that needs to be done—the people with wounds, the crowds wanting to see Jesus—and can't imagine Jesus or his disciples resting. There's still so much to be done, Jesus—what do you mean, rest?

That Jesus? He's pretty smart.

The disciples listen to Jesus' instructions—they get in the boat and sail away to a deserted place where we can imagine they slept, washed their things and regrouped. This is what happens after an amazing experience—the laundry needs to be done, there's still worship for the 75 faithful gathered at the local congregation and daily tasks are waiting. If we read the selection as indicated, skipping some 20 verses in the middle, it seems as if Jesus just keeps working—healing, teaching and listening. This is Jesus as his busy, holy self. He's Jesus, after all, and while I need my sleep, maybe he doesn't.

But there's that big gap in the lectionary passage for this Sunday. Usually I don't quibble with lectionary decisions. This time, though, we miss out on a narrative cycle that includes not only the next big adventure for the disciples (the feeding of the 5,000) but also an important and oft-neglected piece: Jesus goes away to pray by himself.

I cherish the scripture that tells me Jesus retreated. It isn't just the sleep that is necessary; it's that the rest insists on the disciples' attention. The day-to-day flurry of activity needs to be interspersed with time for prayer and rest. All too often I end the day with a to-do list that's longer than when I started. While I'm driving home, I usually think of one more person I should have called, one more situation I should have checked. I hear and see people clamoring for Jesus; certainly I must be the only one who can row his boat to shore. Right?

Obviously there's at least one flaw to my logic: Jesus could just walk to shore if necessary.

Knowing that Jesus heeds his own advice and spends time away from the crowd does wonders for my own devotional life and sense of spiritual well-being. There were still people coming to see Jesus after he went away to pray, but he left them in order to return renewed to his life among the people, healing and teaching and showing compassion to those who came to him.

I have since chaperoned groups attending teen gatherings like the one I loved so much. Even as an adult I experience such events as life-giving and faith-enriching—but now they are also incredibly exhausting. When I deliver the youth back to their waiting parents, I provide a brief statement that could be considered a warning label: “They had a great time and have lots of stories to share. And they’re very, very tired.”

And then I go home to sleep.