

“A Quiet Place”

The Way of Jesus – part 4

Psalm 23, Mark 1:29-39

[title screen] *Welcome, prayer.*

[road rage] Have you ever seen the TV show “Myth Busters”? I remember watching an episode where they tested whether or not stress could influence your gas mileage. In other words, if you were a relaxed driver, would you use less gas than if you were stressed? They sent two guys to both complete the course. The first time, the team did everything they could to relax the drivers: gave them massages, played calm music, showed them maps, and even put a voice-activated GPS in the car. However, the second time, before driving the same course, these men were forced to drink 32 ounces of coffee, they were locked out of the bathroom, and forced to drive while loud, blaring music played over their car radios. The difference was astounding. In the second test, one driver almost ran over a pedestrian. Both drivers consumed much twice as much gas on the second time through the course. The test confirmed the myth – when you are stressed, you use more fuel.

[dad and boys] Today I want us to talk about refueling our souls. As a pastor, I’ve been taught that it is especially critical for those in ministry to refuel our spiritual tanks. There are many places I love to do this: For example, I’ve been to several Father-Son winter retreats, where we had a great time tubing, ice skating, playing games and doing scavenger hunts. My best memory is my dad and my two sons worshiping, singing, praying, and reading our bibles together. It was awesome spending time outdoors and connecting with each other and God.

[meditate] A few years ago, I took part in a three-day retreat with 25 United Methodist pastors from all around Michigan. With these men and women, my friends and colleagues, we talked about work, stress, relaxing and Sabbath. We sang, played, ate, and some of us even went tubing.

While we were there, we watched a video entitled “Dead Leader Running,” featuring Wayne Cordeira, a Hawaiian pastor. You can look up it up on YouTube.¹ Although the message was meant for pastors, I found that his words were really

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=roZWOWs22R0>

for all of us. Wayne said that we all have emotional tanks with inputs and drains. Certain things fill our tanks: music, outdoor recreation, spending time with friends and family, eating good food. Other things drain our tanks, like illness, stress, death, arguments, loss of a job.

When your tank is full, it is a lot easier to be kind, loving, and productive. We want to have full tanks. So the question is, how do we keep them full?

[crowd] Jesus always had a full tank, even though he was constantly on the go. He preached everywhere. Jesus performed miracles, cast out demons. Hundreds, even thousands of people flocked to him. If anyone should be stressed, it is Jesus. But Jesus was not running on empty. How is this possible?

[Jesus in the desert] We find the answer in Mark 1:35 – Early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus went to a solitary place. A deserted place. A remote place. Alone. Why? He went to pray. Jesus went to connect with God and refill his tank.

Mark 1:12 tells us, the first time Jesus went into the desert, it was because the Holy Spirit sent him there to be tempted. It was very strenuous. However, the second time Jesus entered the desert by his own choice. Jesus did not go to be stressed. He went to relax and refuel.

[Jesus and disciples] As you read this scripture, it seems that the only calm one is Jesus. His disciples were clearly anxious. Verses 36 & 37 say they looked for Jesus – hunted for him, searching desperately. When they finally found him, they were exasperated. “What about all these people, Jesus? We need to make them form lines, get some extra crowd security, make you a schedule!” (My interpretation.) The disciples were anxious to start a miracle business. They knew Jesus could make Capernaum famous.

[Carlsbad fountain] There is a spa town in the Czech Republic called Carlsbad that is famous for its hot springs, which supposedly have healing properties that have been known for centuries. The whole place is a tourist town, with spas and pools and hotels. I believe that the disciples wanted to make Capernaum into something like that, a place famous for healing. Who wouldn't you want to go there?

[Jesus and disciples] Yet we all know, one of the worst things that can drain your tank is constantly trying to please other people. It certainly is a temptation in ministry.

Jesus does not fall for that temptation. Because his tank is full, he knows what to do. In verse 38, Jesus replies, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.”

Jesus tells them, “We need to go to the other towns.” Jesus knows his purpose. He knows his mission. His tank is full, so he can deal with the stress appropriately.

Could you have resisted that temptation? Fame and fortune beckon, and Jesus declines. What would you do? Would you give into the stress, the anxiety, the tyranny of the moment? Would you drain your tank?

[scripture] Sabbath is one of the ten commandments we really don’t like to talk about. In Exodus 20, God explicitly commanded the people to rest. (Exodus 20:8-11) Sabbath comes from the verb *shavat*, which means “to stop.” God commands us to pause, to rest, because God knows what is best for us. Sabbath was integral in the Jewish life. In fact, the Sabbath day begins at sundown – you literally start the day with dinner and going to sleep.

What is interesting about the Sabbath command is that it comes between the first three commandments, which all deal with loving God, and it is followed by six more commandments that deal with loving our neighbor. There is a connection here that we must not miss. Sabbath – stopping to rest – connects our relationship with God to our relationship with our neighbors. Jesus said the greatest commandment was to “Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.” And, he added, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39)

[stress] This was the connection that Jesus made. Loving God and loving your neighbor are intimately related. How can you love God when your tank is empty? How can you love others if you can’t love yourself? Simply put, you cannot.

Jesus spent time with his heavenly Father. Jesus, God incarnate, a member of the Trinity, stopped to find a quiet place to pray and be refreshed. How can we do any less?

[scripture] In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus said...actually, commanded us to "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Are you weary? Do you want to lay down your burden? Do you crave that rest for your soul? Do you want to believe Jesus that his burden is light?

[water tank] Allow me to give you some practical ways that we can do that, from Pastor Wayne's illustration. Imagine your emotional tank is a real vessel. There are inflows and drains. Make a list of what fills your tank: exercise, reading, playing, spending time with friends and family, whatever it is. Recognize the things that fill you. And in a second list, identify your drains: work, illness, grief, and so on.

When the tank is full, we can deal with the drains. That's why refueling is so important to your well-being and to those around you.

When our anxiety increases, the level in our tanks gets too low. Then alarms go off. We have anxiety attacks, emotional and nervous breakdowns. But when these happen, we tend to react by shutting down the inflow. We start to say, "I'm too busy. I'm too busy to go for a walk. I'm too busy to talk to my family." According to Wayne, that's crazy. In addition to opening your drain wide, you pinch off the inflow – that's a recipe for disaster.

In my work as a pastor, I've always claimed a day for Sabbath, usually Friday, and I try to protect it. Other times, I simply say, "Today, right now, I'm dropping everything and I'm going into the woods" When I rest and collect my thoughts, I have more energy later to work, because I took time to fill my tank.

You need a full tank to worship God and to love others. So here is my challenge to you. First, make a list of things you do to connect with God. Hopefully this is an easy list. What do we do? We worship. Pray. Read scripture. Meditate. Talk with Christian friends. Serve others. Make that list that tells you how you best connect with God.

Then I want you to make a second list. What are the things that fill your emotional tank? What do you do, where, and with whom? When are you the happiest, the most fulfilled? Write those things down.

Finally, make a third list of the things that drain you. This might be the hardest list to write. There is a lot of pain in this world. Jesus said that we are weary and burdened. But the healing process starts with identifying the things that drain us. So write them down. What bothers you? What do you have a hard time letting go of?

There is one more thing you can do for extra credit – share these lists with someone close to you. Your spouse, your best friend, your child, your mom or dad. Share it with someone who “gets” you, and ask them to also make a list and share it with you. Make these lists your prayer focus for a month. Say to the Lord, “Help me fill their tank. Help me share their burden. Help me remind them to stay in love with you.”

[title slide] Imagine all the good that would come out of our relationships if we just did these three things. How much more would we love Jesus, love God, love our friends, our neighbors, and our spouses? With full tanks, we could be the greatest expression of God’s love Houghton has ever seen. That would be awesome. Make a commitment to keep Sabbath a priority in your life. All of us need it.

Let’s pray.

Memory Verse: Matthew 11:28

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Reflection Questions:

1. What fills your emotional and spiritual tanks? What drains them? Have you shared this list with someone closest to you?
2. Jesus went to the desert to be refreshed. Do you find that ironic? Where do you go to be refreshed?
3. What spiritual disciplines help you connect to God? How often do you practice them?
4. Do you desire to grow closer to God? What are you willing to give up in order for this to happen? What commitments and priorities do you need to rethink?
5. How can you help fill someone’s tank this week?