
SEEING THE NEED

Tony Campolo is a very well-known and popular Christian speaker.

- Many years ago, he was going to a speaking engagement accompanied by his family.
 - When they arrived, there were only two cars in the parking lot.
- His son, Bart, said, "Dad, there's nobody here."
- His daughter, Lisa, said, "If you're so famous why didn't anybody come?"
- Bart said, "Be quiet, Lisa. It's hard to be famous when nobody knows who you are."

Today we hear about the spreading fame of JESUS.

- Initially, people came to HIM in the hope that HE would perform a miracle.
 - Now though, after hearing about HIM from the disciples JESUS had sent to prepare the way for HIM, the crowds came because they anticipated that HE might have something more to offer.
 - They wanted to see if JESUS was all the disciples said HE was.

There was so much going on and so many people coming that JESUS and HIS followers didn't even have a chance to eat.

- So, JESUS said to them, "Come with ME by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."
- I can almost imagine JESUS' voice saying these words and I always start to relax the moment I hear or read this verse.
 - And yet...and yet they get no rest.
- The crowds see where they are going and get there ahead of them.
 - Or, I should say, the crowds-in-need get there ahead of them and JESUS can't refuse them. And that's important.

What happens is ironic when JESUS takes the disciples away.

- They are tired and hungry and in need of rest.
- They have just returned from their two-by-two mission to announce that the MESSIAH, the SAVIOR, has come,
 - and to demonstrate the power that this SAVIOR brings by healing the sick and casting out demons,

Such work is not easy.

- It is rewarding but tiring; enlivening but draining; joyful but wearying.
 - So, JESUS invites them to come away to tell HIM of their adventures, and for some much-needed and well-deserved rest.
 - JESUS knows that rest is essential to our living, especially into the hopes and dreams GOD has for us.

A 2012 study by UCLA was performed by observing the typical week of thirty-two middle-class families in the Los Angeles area.

- The researchers desired to take a snapshot of American life early in the 21st century.
 - The results were described by one researcher as "disheartening."

- Americans are so consumed with working, buying, gathering, and generally doing what they think will improve their life,
 - that they actually spend very little time together as families enjoying time with those for whom they were working.
 - Jeanne Arnold, the lead author, and a professor of anthropology at UCLA reported:
 - “Something like 50 of the 64 parents in our study never stepped outside during a full week.
 - When they gave us tours of their house, they’d say, ‘Here’s the backyard. I don’t have time to go there.’”
 - Leisure time was spent in front of the TV or at the computer.
 - They do not or cannot find the time to rest.
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Again, hear the words of JESUS: “Come with ME by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

- This is not just an invitation to take an afternoon off or go on a vacation, though these things are important when we do them.
 - Rather, this is an invitation to free ourselves from the cages into which we’ve placed ourselves and from the idea that the key to happiness is more,
 - and that the ticket to more is work.
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But, as I said, it’s also ironic.

- JESUS calls HIS disciples to take some time for rest.
 - But they get no rest.

JESUS sees their need but also sees the needs of the people and has compassion for them.

- That is who JESUS is. HIS compassion for others is demonstrated by HIS commitment to meet their needs,
 - and HE does this first by teaching them, and then by feeding them (which we skip over today but will hear next week),
 - and when they cross back over to the other side of the lake, by addressing any other needs they bring to HIM.
 - JESUS tries to provide rest to HIS students and HIMSELF, but HIS compassion for the crowds and their needs leads HIM to set aside the very rest they had sought,
 - and address the needs of the others at the expense of their own needs.
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This leads me to want to ask you to perform a little exercise here.

- First, I want you to think—hard—and name your deepest needs.
 - Not wants, but needs.
 - What do you need to feel whole, to be happy, to lead a fulfilling life, to feel like you belong, to make a difference in the world, and to be the person GOD has called you to be?
 - Take a moment right now to think about that.
- Next, ask yourself this very challenging question: What could I change to have those needs I just named?
 - What would I have to give up, or take on?
 - How could I reorganize and redirect my life to get closer to meeting those needs?
 - Think about that right now.

- Finally, one more question: How might the church help you to live a more abundant life?
 - What could St. Andrew offer that it is not offering now that would be a blessing to you in helping you to refocus your life?
 - How could this congregation get better at meeting the real needs that the people here and the people around us desire?
 - Think for a few moments about that.
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Now that I've challenged you to consider some changes, let me bring us back to the scriptures.

Today's gospel reminds us that it is JESUS who invites us to rest, and JESUS who, seeing the needs of those around HIM, responds in compassion.

- It is JESUS who does these things.
- JESUS, not us.
 - Certainly, we can imagine, recommit ourselves, take steps to be better about rest or response, and come closer to living into GOD's hopes.
 - Certainly, we can move more into GOD's call to care for each other and the world around us.
 - But we won't get very far if we don't recognize that it is JESUS who best shows compassion for the crowds and us.

It is JESUS who still responds to our needs in compassion and love.

- And when we realize that,
 - when we find ourselves stopped short by the size of the task, that HIS compassion for the crowds continues even when HE is exhausted,
 - and when we are caught up in the reality and reality-changing truth of HIS love,
 - only then can we look around us and see and respond to the needs of those in our community with a measure of that compassion and love.
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JESUS calls us out of our congregations to meet the needs of those around us.

- We have work to do, because, Christians, the needs are great, the crowds are still gathering, and so many, many people need to hear the good news of GOD's love in JESUS.

But JESUS always responds to their needs, sometimes through us, sometimes through others, and sometimes through ways unseen.

- Yet, when JESUS sends us, it is always and only after HE sees, attends to, and heals us in our need.
- JESUS is already out there in front of us, and when we leave this place to go forth, we will find HIM in the very needs of those we seek to serve.
 - It is JESUS, first and always.