

July 21 Sermon: Jesus Shows Us the Power of Saying No

Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56

Those first apostles have just returned from their first mission trip. And they are excited. They “gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.” They were healing the sick, and casting out unclean spirits, and proclaiming the gospel. And they were ready to do more, to build on their success. But Jesus responded to their enthusiasm with this invitation to “come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” Jesus knew that this rest was the most important thing that his disciples could now, the most needed thing. They have done important work, but now it was time to rest.

But I don't think that this rest is simply physical rest. I think Jesus is offering them spiritual rest, rest for their souls. What Jesus is doing is inviting his disciples to do what he did regularly.

We might become, for example, more and more frustrated and burned out, even if we are doing good things. We might forget why we are doing those good things. We might forget to rely on God when we are doing those things. Or forget that it is not about us; it's about God.

I think that this is why Jesus is encouraging his disciples to get away and rest a while, after they have returned from their mission

In today's gospel reading, the deserted place that Jesus took the disciples to did not stay deserted for long. “Many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns.” So, what did Jesus do? Did he tell the crowds to leave, or did he go with his disciples to find a new and more deserted place? No, when he saw the crowd, Jesus “had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.” The rest led to the mission.

Rest for our weary souls is what Jesus offers to us all. And we all need that rest. So, how do we achieve this rest? What does rest have to do with saying no and showing compassion? I have some thoughts I would like to share with you: I believe that we cannot show compassion until we understand the power of no. A power that Jesus was fully aware.

Listen to Brene Brown as she addresses this issue.

#1 The Power of Saying No: Setting Healthy Boundaries

Saying “no” can be difficult for many reasons. Perhaps you’re afraid of hurting someone’s feelings, or maybe you don’t want to miss out on an opportunity. We’ve been conditioned to believe that saying “yes” is always the right thing to do. From a young age, we’re taught that being accommodating and selfless is admirable, and we’re praised for putting others’ needs before our own. While there’s nothing inherently wrong with being kind and helpful, this societal pressure to say “yes” all the time can make it difficult to set boundaries and prioritize our own needs.

Jesus Himself set boundaries around His time. One of my favorite stories is in Mark 4: 35-40.

That day when evening came, He said to His disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” Leaving the crowd behind, they took Him along, just as He was, in the boat. There were also other boats with Him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

He said to His disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

[And for some reason, in my mind, He then groggily laid back down on His cushion and went back to sleep.]

Jesus sees that there is work to be done. He sees the crowd. He knows people need to be healed, demons need to be cast out, and lessons need to be taught. But He still tells His disciples to get in the boat, and once there, He falls asleep. Yes, the needs of the people are urgent, and their requests (or cries) for healing must have been compelling.

We must start breaking busy before the busy breaks us.

Saying no is a way of setting healthy boundaries, taking charge and valuing my time, accepting responsibility for my own well-being, and respecting my limitations. It was a way of saying, “I love you, but I love myself too, and I need to take care of myself in this moment.”

#2 The Power of Saying No: Rest and Relax

We need rest! Here is a Far Side comic finding Andrew resting. I also smiled recently when I read about an angry church member who blustered up to his minister, saying, “I phoned you Monday, but I couldn’t get you.” The preacher explained that it was his day off. “What? A day off? The devil never takes a day off!” exclaimed the member with holier-than-thou indignation. “That’s right,” said the minister, “and if I didn’t take any ‘time out,’ I would be just like him!”

Yes, we do need to rest. As Vance Havner used to say: “If we don’t come apart from the business of life, we’ll come apart!”

According to a Greek legend, in ancient Athens a man noticed the great storyteller Aesop playing childish games with some little boys. He laughed at Aesop and asked him why he wasted his time in such frivolous activity. Aesop responded by picking up a bow, loosening its string and placing it on the ground. Then he said to the man, “Now, answer the riddle, if you can. Tell us what the unstrung bow represents.”

The man looked at it for several minutes but had no idea what point Aesop was trying to make. Aesop explained, “If you keep a bow always bent, it will break eventually; but if you let it go slack, it will be more fit for use when you want it.”

Our lives can be like that. We are so stressed and bent like the bow, eventually we will snap. Setting boundaries in our lives is the only way to ensure we stay healthy physically, mentally, and spiritually.

#3 The Power of Saying No: More Compassion!

Showing compassion! Jesus knows that to do this, he and his disciples had to take a break. Jesus probably told the disciples that they must take care of themselves if they are to take care of other people. He had to show His followers that compassion is a part of discipleship. Compassion is required on our part. It hits us in the gut and sends us into motion for the sake of others. that exists in the world today. Isn't it selfish to rest when the world needs us? If we want to be used by God, we must imitate Him and have compassion for those in need.

The needs of the people will always be among us. We can't get away from the emails, the calls we must return, the meetings, our duties in life, or conflicts. Our zeal for the things of God must be according to the fact that we need to sometimes stop, be still and listen to God's voice.

Applications: Here are some more tips to help you say "no" with confidence and grace:

- **Use Positive Language:** Instead of just saying "no," try framing your response in a positive way. For example, "I would love to help, but unfortunately, I can't right now."
- **Show Empathy:** Acknowledge the other person's perspective and needs. Try to see the situation from their point of view and show compassion and understanding.
- **Offer Creative Solutions:** If you can't fulfill a request, think outside the box and offer alternative solutions. This can show that you're still invested in finding a solution, just in a different way.

- **Keep it Brief:** You don't need to over-explain your decision. A simple and honest response is usually enough.
- **Prioritize Self-Care:** Remember that it's okay to prioritize your own well-being and set boundaries. Saying "no" is an act of self-care and shows that you value your time and energy.
- **Expect Pushback:** Some people may not take your "no" well, but that's okay. Stay mindful and compassionate and remember that you have the right to decline a request or invitation while still honoring your own needs.

I think that the key to saying no to others is to cultivate a sense of self-awareness and self-compassion. Jesus did by being in touch with his own needs and desires, that helped him approach difficult situations with clarity and confidence. And by remaining open and empathetic to the needs of others, he found ways to navigate the complex social dynamics with grace and kindness.

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