

"A Quiet Place"

The Way of Jesus – part 4

Mark 1:29-39

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.

Today I want us to talk about refueling our souls. The past week I spent much time refueling my spiritual tank. First I went to a Father-Son retreat with Jonah at Camp Barakel. We had a great time tubing, ice skating, playing games and doing scavenger hunts. Together we worshiped, singing, praying, and reading our bibles. It was an awesome spending time outdoors and connecting with each other and God.

On Monday I took a three-day retreat at Cran-Hill Ranch with 25 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 at Cran-Hill Ranch, we watched a video entitled "Dead Leader Running," featuring Wayne Cordeira, a Hawaiian pastor. You can look up it up on YouTube. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=roZWOWs22R0>)

Although the message was meant for pastors, I found that his words were really for all of us. Wayne said that we all have emotional tanks with inputs and drains. [Draw the illustration.]

We all have things that fill our tanks, and things that drain them. My past week included a lot of tank filling: music, outdoor recreation, spending time with friends and family, eating good food. Those things all filled my tank. When your tank is full, it is a lot easier to be kind, loving, and productive. But we know there are things that drain our tanks. Things like illness, stress, death, arguments, loss of a job.

Would you agree with me that we all want to have full tanks? Yes! Then the question we have to answer is, how do we keep them full?

As per usual, we look to Jesus for that answer. There are many things we know about Christ, and one of them is, Jesus always had a full tank. Look at what Jesus does according to Mark chapter 1. Jesus is constantly on the go. He is preaching. (I, for one, will attest how exhausting that is!) Jesus is performing miracles, casting out demons. Hundreds, even thousands of people are flocking to him. If anyone should be stressed, it is Jesus. But Jesus was not stressed. He was not running on empty. How is this possible? 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.

If you go back a few paragraphs, you read in Mark 1:12 that the first time Jesus went into the desert, the Holy Spirit sent him there – literally, the Spirit drove Jesus, like a herder driving animals. What happened? The first time, Jesus was tempted in the desert. It was strenuous for him. However, in this passage we read today, we find that Jesus entered the desert the second time by his own choice. Jesus did not go to be stressed. He went to find quiet and refuel.

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 – literally, 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!" (OK, that's how I would have translated those verses.) The disciples were anxious to start a miracle business. They knew Jesus could make Capernaum famous.

I once visited Carlsbad, in the Czech Republic. It is a town 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?

One of the things that can definitely drain my tank is trying to please people. Would anyone here agree? It is insidious, but sometimes, the most draining thing you can do in your life is try to be a people pleaser. It certainly is a temptation in ministry.

Jesus does not fall for that temptation. Because his tank is full, he knows what to do. Look at verse 38. "Jesus replied, '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." He doesn't make the people come to him. Jesus knows his purpose. He knows his mission. His tank is full, so he can deal with the stress appropriately.

Let me ask you, 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?

One of the things we talked about with the pastors this week is about the Sabbath. You might remember, in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), God explicitly commanded the people to rest. In fact, by word count, the 4th commandment is the longest. (Exodus 20:8-11) It 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. Remember what Jesus said, when they asked him what was the greatest commandment? (Matthew 22:37-39) He said, Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And, he added, love your neighbor as yourself.

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?

It is Jesus who commanded us in Matthew 11:28-30, "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?

Allow me to give you some practical ways that we can do that, from Pastor Wayne's illustration. Imagine that this is your tank. Here are the inflows and the drains. If I were to make a list of what fills my tank, I would include things like cross-country skiing, biking, hiking, wind-surfing, playing games, and spending time with my family. These are things that fill me. On the other hand, there are drains on me, like seminary, counseling, writing sermons, office work, illness, and dealing with a death in our church family.

When the tank is full, we can deal with the drains. That's why I spent so much time refueling last week. Think about your life. Sometimes those drains are pretty big. Stress at work. Stress at home. Financial stress. Health issues. Even death in the family.

What happens when our anxiety heightens, when the level in our tank gets too low? Alarms go off. We have anxiety attacks, emotional breakdowns,

nervous breakdowns. But what is normally our reaction? Our reaction is often to shut 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.

I have a small confession. I didn't finish my sermon transcript as early as I wanted to, because of my schedule this last week. I was very busy. But Friday morning, I made an intentional choice to go cross-country skiing for an hour. During that time, I collected my thoughts, and I had more energy to write when I came back. 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 your spouse. If you are not married, share it with your best friend, your child,

your mom or dad. Share it with someone closest to you, who "gets" you, and ask them to make a list and share it with you. Then make these lists your prayer focus for a month. Daily pray, Lord, help me fill their tank. Help me share their burden. Help me remind them to stay in love with you.

Can you imagine all the good that would come 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 Bellaire has ever seen? Wouldn't that be awesome? As your pastor, I am making a commitment to making Sabbath a priority in my life. As a church, I challenge you to do the same.

Memory Verse: Luke 5:16

"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."

Reflection Questions:

1. What fills your tank? What drains it? 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?