

## *Jesus was tired*

**St. Paul's, Milford  
Sunday 6 September 2015: 8:00 and 9:30**

If you look at the gospel for today you'll see quite readily that it's in two parts; two stories about Jesus healing people. One a woman's daughter who was mentally ill; the other a man with a speech impediment. In each case Jesus healed them. And you may also have noticed that neither of these people appear to be Jewish. The woman was from present day Lebanon; the man probably from Syria or Jordan. There's a lot more we could say about them.

When I started researching this passage I wanted to see if there was anything new in these stories I hadn't come across before. It wasn't long before I found something; a thing I hadn't particularly noticed before. And it was this: Jesus was tired. Tired, I think, to the point of exhaustion. Now that's not the sort of image of Jesus we give much attention to. Have you ever seen a stained-glass window with an image of Jesus trying to sleep? I haven't. We see him suffering on the cross, we see him doing miracles, acting with compassion, preaching, healing, etc., but I don't think I've ever seen a picture of Jesus trying to get away from people so he can get some rest. And yet it's recorded more than once in the Gospels.

I don't think it's just an oversight either. I think the church has simply not wanted to acknowledge that Jesus got tired. As if to say, Jesus never got tired and never needed to sleep. The same people also suggested that he never really ate or drank either! But in fact the Gospel stories go to some lengths to make it clear to us that Jesus both ate and drank and that he needed rest. Remember the time when He was found asleep in the middle of a storm at sea, when everybody really should have been awake! That tells us that Jesus was capable of sleeping very soundly, presumably because he got very tired.

In today's reading, at any rate, Jesus is tired and if you read between the lines he's not only suffering the effect of long hours of intense interaction with an enormous number of people. He's also dealing with the fact that his cousin, John the Baptist, has just been executed by that psychopath King Herod. Now we'll never know exactly how this affected Jesus, but we do know that he loved John. John was his cousin and Jesus once said: "no man, born of woman, was greater than John!" Yet Herod, you'll remember, had presented the head of John the Baptist to his daughter-in-law on a platter at dinner. Jesus loved John and we know that when he heard about John's death he said to his disciples. "Come away by yourselves, to a lonely place and rest a while." Obviously it affected him deeply.

Whenever Jesus tried to get away from it all the crowd always found out. How often do we read something like: ‘And Jesus went away to a quiet place by himself’? And then how often do we then read: ‘They hurried there on foot. Then Jesus saw a great crowd and had compassion for them.’ Then there was the time when Jesus deliberately got into a boat to get away from the crowd, but they worked out where he was going and were waiting for him there when he got there! Jesus had compassion for those people. He worked with them, he taught them and he fed them! Jesus failed miserably to have proper ‘time-out’!

And so we come across Jesus in our Gospel reading today, making a third attempt to try to get some rest for himself. He heads off into the region of Tyre and Sidon – in other words, southern Lebanon on today’s map. This part of Lebanon wasn’t and isn’t a popular holiday spot. It was remote and uninviting and no self-respecting Jew would be found there. And so Jesus thought this might be a good place to get away from it all, to have a quiet time. Well, that was the theory! This local woman finds him and asks Him to heal her daughter.

But Jesus tells her to go away. What’s more, he tells her to go away in rather strong terms, apparently referring to her as a dog! Now that’s a puzzle to us. Did Jesus really say that? Now we might be tempted to sort of apologise for the way Jesus treats this woman. Or at least to explain his words in a way that makes them seem less offensive. But let’s note that the Gospel writer didn’t see any need to do that. Maybe that’s because Mark’s original readers would have expected a Jewish man to treat a Lebanese woman like that anyway? Maybe? However we understand it - whether we assume that Jesus wasn’t actually being offensive or whether we think that Jesus was testing the woman or whether we think it was just Jesus in his exhaustion, pleading for some peace, we know how the story turns out. The woman persists in her pleading with Jesus, and her persistence is rewarded - “Go home. Your daughter is going to be fine!”

We remember that woman because she was assertive, a bit pushy. The sort who would say, “I’d like to speak to the manager”. She was strong, she was assertive, she was audacious and she was faithful. But it ended any hope Jesus had of using Tyre and Sidon as a place to recuperate. Almost immediately after this incident we read that Jesus returned from the region of Tyre and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee in the region of the Decapolis.

We’re not told exactly why Jesus shot through. Possibly it was because this healing had a similar effect to the one that immediately followed it - where Jesus brought back the hearing of the deaf man after sticking His fingers in the

man's ears and putting spit on his tongue. What happened? Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one, but the more he ordered them the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He's done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak". In other words, once again Jesus became the talk of the town. Any hope of Jesus taking a break vanished.

I think that we can understand this. Great things had happened. Not surprisingly, they wanted to tell everyone about it. And so we have this rather bizarre picture of Jesus, standing in the middle of a crowd of very excited people who are saying how wonderful he is, while he's pleading with them not to make a big deal of it all. Jesus ordered the people not to tell anyone, but the more he ordered them not to the more they did so.

Why didn't he get a break? Because, it seems, he had the ability to heal diseases, cast out demons, calm the raging seas and feed 5000 people, but he did NOT have the ability to stop people from talking about him.

Whenever I've visited a primary school I've been impressed with teachers who were able to quieten a whole room of stropy children with just a few words. She'd say, "I want to hear a pin drop". Within moments there was complete silence. This seems to be the sort of ability that the Lord Jesus did NOT have!

We're told that, 'He ordered them to keep quiet, but the more he ordered them the louder they became!' Fascinating, isn't it, that he who calmed the raging sea could NOT calm an excited crowd! "He has done all things well," they said and then continued to carry on!

Wherever you see Jesus in action in the stories of the New Testament you see a fair degree of pandemonium following him! People are being healed, communities are being stirred up, political rulers are getting upset and everyone is talking excitedly! Whenever Jesus visited a town that town was never the same again. Whether it's his home town of Nazareth or the bustling metropolis of Jerusalem or somewhere in the middle of nowhere in Southern Lebanon. Wherever Jesus goes there's healing, there's new life, there's turmoil, there's controversy and there's bustling activity!

Is that true of our lives; true of this parish? Is our life chaotic because God is so much in action? How often do we think that things will settle down for us as soon as we get properly organised? But maybe that's not the root of the problem at all. Maybe the reason we can never get settled is because the Spirit of God is at work! Maybe we're not meant to operate like a well-oiled machine!

I think many of us assume that this quiet, settled lifestyle is only just around the corner. Once the new vicar arrives! But I've been in parishes before, in the diocese, in office situations and it seems that I've been waiting for it to arrive now almost every day for years! That quiet, settled lifestyle. But maybe we need to accept that it's never going to happen, because it's not supposed to happen? Maybe it's time to realise that the only way to live a quiet, settled life is to get the Spirit of God out of the picture. Because where the Spirit of God is there is activity, there is controversy, there's plenty of room for misunderstanding, pain and difficulty. A certain degree of chaos is always part of the equation.

I'm sorry to disillusion you if you made the mistake of thinking that following Jesus would result in having a quieter, more comfortable life. Expect the opposite! If you persist with Jesus you can be guaranteed to find healing; you can be guaranteed to find community, but you can also be guaranteed to find controversy and one other thing - you can be guaranteed that you'll get tired!

Are you tired? That's OK. Jesus got tired too! And we do need rest. Jesus knows we do need rest. Indeed, Jesus promises us rest. But the truth is that our ultimate rest is not going to come just yet, as there are, literally today, lots of Lebanese women (amongst others) who need our support! And so I think we're going to have to accept, as Jesus did, that breaks are not always going to come as frequently as we might like.

Are you tired? Well, welcome to the world of Jesus! Welcome to the world of Christian discipleship. Welcome to the roller-coaster of ministry and mission. It's not an easy path. But it's the path of courage, integrity, self-discipline and service. All this in the name of Him of whom it was said, "He has done all things well".