

## Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Today's passage doesn't appear in many commentaries. It's not a well-known passage like the beheading of John the Baptist from last week or the feeding of the 5000 which actually happens in the middle of this passage. Rather, this is a transition passage to describe a transition in the ministry of the disciples and Jesus' ministry.

You see, the disciples had just come from a journey of healing and teaching where they had been sent off in groups of two going from village to village. They've just returned ready to tell Jesus about all that they saw and did. But we don't get too much explanation.

What we do know is that they returned from their action-packed journeys and are *still* quite busy. They were "coming and going" and they didn't even have time to do something necessary to basic life- eat.

The disciples were separated and when they were supposed to be coming back together as a community, they found themselves with no time to eat or to be together at this time of transition.

Hmmm...I wonder...does this sound familiar to anyone? Separated for a long amount of time...now able to come back together? We too, here in this nation have

been separated- in quarantine and socially distanced. And now, too, we find ourselves in a time where we are supposed to be getting back together in our communities. We too find ourselves in a time of collective transition.... But the disciples' transition back together wasn't so smooth, and ours hasn't been the easiest either!

I for one, I've never been one to struggle with insomnia. I love sleep and I'm good at it! Just ask my partner how good I usually am at sleeping in. But the past month and a half I've found myself waking up in the middle of the night unable to sleep again. I thought maybe it was just me-. But I was shocked to learn this week that I am not the only one. Studies have shown that insomnia rates went up considerably in several countries and the word "insomnia" was Googled more in 2020 than it was ever before.<sup>1</sup> Even though we spent more time at home than we ever planned or imagined, we are not well rested.

This insomnia may be a sign of what Psychologist Adam Grant believes may be the dominant experience of 2021 - the mental health phenomenon of "languishing." He says, "Languishing is a sense of stagnation and emptiness. It feels as if you're muddling through your days, looking at your life through a foggy windshield."

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<sup>1</sup> Bryan Lufkin, "The 'coronasomnia; keeping you from getting sleep," The BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20210121-the-coronasomnia-phenomenon-keeping-us-from-getting-sleep>

It's not depression, but it's not **flourishing** either. It's an absence of well-being. It's a kind of in-between, transitional state, while we work towards well-being and a sense of flourishing. <sup>2</sup>

I imagine the disciples in a similarly languishing, in-between, state. And what we find is that Jesus **deeply cares** for them, and he calls them to come away to a deserted place and to rest. Jesus **wants** them to **flourish** in the midst of all the working and serving they've been doing. Jesus recognizes the human tendency of the disciples to work themselves into the ground at the expense of all else and wants to free them from that.

We find a God who says, "Hold on! Push the pause button." We find a God that encourages action AND reflection. That shows the disciples that these awkward times of transition aren't to be forgotten or rushed through, but they CAN BE essential moments of REST and REFRESHMENT.

And not only that- But Jesus invites them to enter that rest TOGETHER, to come away **together** and IN RELATIONSHIP. To **return to those relationships** that they have let slide, that they have put off in light of their traveling, their work and other activities. Jesus invites them to be together in one place long enough that they could perhaps - I don't know- sit down and enjoy a meal together.

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<sup>2</sup> Adam Grant, "There's a Name for the Bleh You're Feeling: It's Called Languishing," *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/19/well/mind/covid-mental-health-languishing.html> in Debie Thomas, "The Gift of Rest," Journey with Jesus Blog, <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay>

Today too, God cares about US in those times of intense activity - or in our case- pandemic and collective trauma- AND those times of transition. **God sees** us languishing. **God sees** our sleepless nights. And wants to grant us deep rest and restoration of relationship with all creation.

In this time of transition... we are invited to first, put a name to what we've been going through. Don't just brush it off as nothing or thinking that it is just you. The first step to healing is often naming what ails you. Next time someone asks you how you are doing- why not name it.

Then, we are invited to give ourselves permission to check in with ourselves and our loved ones.

We are invited to be mindful of what's happening in our bodies. I've been learning that the three main things that newborns do are eat, sleep, and be awake (because in those first few months they can't play or do much else!). And if one of these areas is off - they won't be able to do the others like they need to survive and grow.

And I've been wondering if adults aren't too far off from this.... When was the last time **you** stopped to think about: Am I getting 8 hours of sleep? Am I getting the nutrients that I need, the exercise I need- the basics that my body needs to function? And what about my waking hours? Are they filled with things that bring things like peace, joy, and fulfilling relationships? If you answered no - this may be affecting your overall ability to flourish!

And after you've checked in with your bodies, we are also invited to let relationships be a priority. To let relationships matter **more** than meetings, **more** than tasks, reports, actions, and plans. When it comes to reconnecting to relationships and finding those life-giving relationships with people in our lives- we might try setting small goals and, we might try, set uninterrupted and unfragmented time with the people we care about.<sup>3</sup> You see as Jesus and the disciples were on their way to a deserted place, a crowd of people rushed ahead of them. Jesus did not shoo them away- Jesus invited that group too into the life-giving relationship with him that he offers us all.

Jesus was the loving shepherd for those who had no one else. Jesus looked out for their well-being. Jesus healed them and made them whole.

So too, during this time of transition when it would be so easy to keep trudging along, or to just go through the motions of going back to normal life (when this past year has been anything but normal!)- without **truly flourishing** - God wants to stop. To join Jesus in pausing. So that we may eat well, sleep well, BE WELL. And to join Jesus's invitation to that deep rest and wholeness that God desires for us.

AMEN.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/19/well/mind/covid-mental-health-languishing.html>