

16th Sunday of the Year [B] 2024

(OSF)

Plans. All of us are familiar with plans. There are family plans, school plans, travel plans, health care plans, game plans, all kinds of plans. For many of us, our days are lived out with plans in mind. Some would say that I border on the compulsive when it comes to that. Usually I plan vacations more than a year in advance—often you get better travel deals that way, and it gives me something to look forward to!

Last Sunday we heard Jesus sending out the apostles, two by two, to preach and heal and cast out demons in the neighboring towns. In today's Gospel, they just got back and they are reporting to Jesus about all that had happened. They must have been pretty excited. They probably thought they were pretty cool.

Mark says that *they rejoined Jesus and told him all they had done and taught. Then he said to them, 'You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while'; for there were so many coming and going that the apostles had no time even to eat. So they went off in a boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves.* They obviously needed a break, so Jesus decided that it was time to get away and get some rest. We can all identify with that, can't we?

It must have been a peaceful scene. They all get into a fishing boat, maybe Peter's or the Zebedee boys', and begin rowing out across the lake, the boat gliding along the smooth waters with the only sound of the oars dipping in the water or a gull or two screeching overhead. Peace at last, along with the prospect of finding a quiet place on the other side where they could unpack their food, sit and talk, and quietly have time to share stories and listen to what Jesus had to say.

But then as they approached the opposite shore, what do they see but this huge crowd there with the noisy voices of hundreds of people? You can imagine how those apostles felt—Aw crap! Look at this! No doubt, they were probably more than annoyed. Their plans were being disrupted.... Life is like that, isn't it? Our best laid plans, and our cherished moments, are too often stolen from us.

How do we react when our plans are either interrupted or completely disrupted? How do we react when people get in the way of our goals? Do we get resentful and make life miserable for those around us? Do we have this huge pity party for ourselves? Or do we see these interruptions or disruptions as part of God's plan for us, an opportunity to experience his grace and perhaps share it with someone else?

When we read the gospels, we see that *Jesus* was interrupted all the time. He couldn't go anywhere without someone wanting something from him. "My daughter is sick, can you come? If I can just touch his clothes... Master have pity on me... Lord, I want to see... What are you doing curing that sick man on the Sabbath?" His time never seemed to be his own.

Here in today's Gospel account, he got out of the boat, even though **he** was tired and needed a break, waded into the crowd, and then gave them beautiful lessons and teachings about life. St. Mark reports: *So as he stepped ashore, he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length.* He did not send them on their way. Instead he gave them his tender and caring love.

I think that in the midst of our busy and often hectic lives, we have to remember that *God's* agenda and *our own* agenda might not always be the same. God has his plans for us, and when they come to bear in our lives, we might have to make some adjustments to our own plans. After all, where is it written that we are entitled to live an easier and more problem-free life than Jesus? Where is it written that our plans are never to be changed?

Our God is a God of surprises. He is a God who gives us unplanned opportunities to show what we are made of and to respond to him in patience and humility, *with love*.

We all have plans. God has his too. And it's *always* going to be better to go with his plan, rather than ours.