

# “Last Blast of Summer”

27 August 2006

Bible passage: Mark 6:30-31 (The Message)

The apostles then rendezvoused with Jesus and reported on all that they had done and taught. Jesus said, “Come off by yourselves; let’s take a break and get a little rest. For there was constant coming and going. They didn’t even have time to eat.”

**Sermon nugget:** The free time of summer is about to draw to a close, but how can we keep the essentials ingredients of summer with us all year long?

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Next weekend is Labor Day weekend, and while the season of summer continues for a few more weeks, most of us really regard Labor Day as our opportunity for that last blast of summer. For the most part, after that holiday weekend, things “return to normal.” By that, I mean that most offices abandon the changed hours some observe during the summer; kids are back in school; football season has started; and the time we had to play golf, or travel, or read, or enjoy our favorite activities begins to dwindle.

Summer is the time, probably because of our prior school experiences, that we think we have to rejuvenate, to relax and to get renewed for the fall and winter ahead of us. Most of us got some vacation time in, and this year, golf aficionados(?) had a chance to play to their hearts’ content, what with the never-ending daylight hours.

I hope that we had the chance for a change of pace. Maybe we got more exercise than usual, or read some books that had been on our shelves waiting to be opened. Maybe we slowed down long enough to draw a deep breath and just stop for a while. Summer just seems to be a time that we equate to more fun and play, a time of relaxation and less stress.

I was looking back in my files and found that we had talked about the break that summer allowed us, and how to get ready to be renewed back in 2001. I quoted a former colleague, David G. Owen, who had imagined that God had created summer in Indiana just for relaxing. David said, “Between the urgent labors of seedtime and harvest, I will stretch summer. I will turn up the heat and humidity so human beings are not tempted to work as hard as usual. I’ll make the sun rise earlier (LSM—not so this summer) and the day linger longer. I’ll invent swimming, and picnics, and girl’s softball. I’ll encourage children to play and adults to slow their pace. I’ll invite human to enjoy life more when it is summer.”

I kind of like what David has to say; summer is a time to play, to have fun, to relax and to slow our pace. So, we probably need to ask ourselves, “How did we do with that?”

Did we relax and slow down some? Did we get renewed and refreshed?”

If I were totally honest in answering those questions for myself, I’d have to answer them with a “no.” Frankly, it’s been a number of years now since it seemed like summer really offered any kind of break for me, and I don’t think I’m the only one who feels that way. Somehow all the bells and whistles that seem to control us make it almost impossible to get away from the routine hassles of work.

Even being miles away is no guarantee that we have let go of work and taken time to kick back and relax. Case in point—when Mike and I were in Colorado a couple of months ago, we decided to drive one of the mountain roads that took us up and over one of the passes. It was an absolutely beautiful drive! There we were at 12,000+ feet, gazing at the incredible beauty of the snow-capped peaks of the Ten Mile Range, when lo and behold, my cell phone rang! And it was a call from my workplace!

Now, granted, it was my fault for taking the phone in the first place, or not turning it off, but do you see what I mean? For most of us, life has changed radically, and we’re reachable any time and in any place. Our daughter was in China this summer with her MBA group, and her work gave her an international cell phone to take in case they needed her, and they did! They only called once, but that was enough to remind her that the places are few and far between where we can be really away from the work that fills our lives most of the time.

Our Bible passage this morning talks of a similar thing that happened in the lives of the disciples. They had been out and about doing the work Jesus had equipped them to do. When they returned to where Jesus was, we find out what happened. The passage goes like this: “The apostles then rendezvoused with Jesus and reported on all that they had done and taught. Jesus said, “Come off by yourselves; let’s take a break and get a little rest. For there was constant coming and going. They didn’t even have time to eat.”

Jesus said to the work-weary disciples, “Let’s take a break and get a little rest.” Jesus said what he said because he understood something that we obviously don’t, and that’s the importance of taking breaks from our busy work routines, and taking time to rest and relax. He knew that breaks are important in order to get re-energized and refreshed, and by that, he wasn’t thinking about just ten minutes in the middle of the day, although that can help, too. He meant some significant time away from the pressures of our everyday lives that can give us a whole new perspective on life and on ourselves.

In reality, Jesus is talking about honoring a sort of Sabbath...as is stated in the Ten Commandments. The word "Sabbath" usually refers to the 7<sup>th</sup> day of creation, to a day of rest. Literally, the root of the word "Sabbath" means, "to catch one's breath." The Sabbath, the day of rest, is a time designed to restore us; it's a time of fun and relaxation that gets us back to our best self.

We all need Sabbath time, but I doubt seriously that we all take it. We're probably a lot like a Phoenix couple that Mort Crim wrote about in one of his books. A man and wife in Phoenix were up to their ears cleaning out their garage one Saturday when a Japanese couple stopped in front of the open door and asked if they could take a picture.

The couple agreed, but they were curious. Here they were, dressed in their jeans and surrounded by clutter, cleaning the garage. Why did these foreign visitors find them interesting enough to photograph? As the Japanese man was raising his camera, he quietly explained, "Our son is thinking of moving to the United States. We want to send him pictures of Americans relaxing on the weekend."

I think Jesus would say to that couple, and to any of the rest of us who have cleaning out the garage on this weekend's agenda, "Let's take a break, and get a little rest." In other words, instead of marking another item off our to-do list, maybe we would be better off by just kicking back a little bit, taking a long, leisurely walk, reading a book, or just watching the squirrels play in the back yard.

My personal take on this whole thing is that you and I need to change some things about our lives, and a big one may have to do with making time for fun, play and relaxation. If we've forgotten how to play, it's time we re-

learned that art. As Willard Gaylin, an ethicist and author, has said, "Life is to be enjoyed, not simply endured. Pleasure and goodness and joy support the pursuit of survival." In John's gospel, Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life, life in all its fullness," and having a life in all its fullness means taking the time to enjoy it, to take breaks, to look around us and take it all. That's what helps us feel alive, really alive!

I think we need to put the fun back into our lives in order to be fully alive. Fun is good for our heads, our hearts, and our spirits. Fun takes our minds off our problems and all the things we have to do, and re-energizes us. One way in which we experience fun is through play. You know, we talk about recreation, but do we actually realize that the word "recreation" is about re-creating? That's what fun and play do—they re-create us!

Now, I would guess that some of you are thinking that this message is a little late in coming. After all, it's called "Last Blast of Summer," and the signs of its waning are already

evident. Why didn't we do this at the start of the summer? Good questions—we just didn't.

But I'd like us to think of it as a challenge. Just because work hours change, attire gets more office-ish, and schedules fill up, that doesn't mean that all chances for relaxation and fun vanish in thin air. It doesn't have to be that way. I would like for us to challenge one another and ourselves to keep the spirit of summer alive all year round.

Fall can still be a beautiful time of year, so there's no reason that we can't set aside some time to relax, to take a break. If we can get the habit of keeping summer throughout the fall, I think it will stick through the winter and into the spring, too. We just need to keep reminding one another of how important it is to take breaks, and to get a rest from our daily routines.

As we prepare for Labor Day weekend and the fall, I'd suggest that we make a list of some of our favorite things to do, and on our next day off, let's really take the day off and do one of them. I think I'm going to try to do what a friend of mine does so very faithfully—he sets aside one "reading day" every month, and that's what he does—he reads. Since reading is one of my favorite activities, I think I'll adopt his strategy and put a day on my calendar to do nothing but read.

Each of us will have to create our own list, and then we will have to keep one another accountable for taking time to do the things we love to do, whether that's fishing, riding bike, walking, touring old homes, taking a nap, whatever it is. I just know that it's important to keep summer all year long. It's vital that we take time for Sabbath, that time to catch our breath, and to rest and re-create. That's what God wants for us.

#### Closing:

If we keep summer by taking breaks and getting renewed, we will be able to say what the French writer, Albert Camus, once said: "In the midst of winter, I found there was within me an invincible summer." May that be so for all of us.

Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.