

My brothers and my sisters in Christ Jesus, now I know that I have not been here very long, but unless some of you have fooled me greatly, I am going to assume that we don't have any ultra-marathon runners here tonight. And even if there were, I would guess that even you have probably never heard of Big Dog's Backyard Ultra.

It's a tiny, very unique race, so I am going to explain it to you briefly. Runners have one hour to complete a 4.167-mile loop ending where they started. And then, as the clock ticks to the start of the next hour, they rerun it. And again, and again, and again. The runners continue to run this same loop over and over again until there is only one person left at the starting line as the gun goes off to start. There isn't a finish line at all.

On the first day, athletes have all the extra time in between the rounds to lounge, sleep, eat, drink, and even receive medicine. But as the runners continue to run, they get into a death spiral. They don't run as fast, so those periods of rest get shorter. On the second day, they are sleep-deprived and dragging. On the third day, they have a few brief moments just to scarf some food and water down and jump back on the trail, exhausted, broken, hopeless.

Have you ever felt that way before? But, I'm not talking about only having 3 minutes to consume a plate of noodles before running another four miles. But have you ever found yourself stuck in the middle of a life race with no finish line? No rest? Finding yourself exhausted, broken, hopeless.

There is always just one more thing. The health improves, but there's a setback, and just as you are starting to adjust and get comfortable and the car needs repairing. You're running short, so you move some finances around to get it fixed, and then guess what, your child gets sick, and you have to stay home from work. And then you're dragging yourself to your next shift of overtime. And then I keep messing up at work and getting yelled at. I put my foot in my mouth because I'm upset, and I have upset my friends. I barely have enough time to spend with my family, or my kids reschedule their visit to me yet again.

And every single time. It takes just a little bit out of you. Those periods of rest and peace are never quite long enough. The breaks are too short. And eventually, it can become just downright depressing. I mean, what's even the point of trying anymore? There's always going to be something else. The subsequent loss will overshadow this win. Even if I don't want to admit it, I'm exhausted, broken hopeless. I am running an ultramarathon with no finish line.

If you've ever felt like that, or you are feeling like that right now in church today. This is a section of scripture about Jesus' ministry that is all about that. This portion of Mark is a continuation of what we meditated on last week. Where Jesus sent his disciples out to the world to proclaim that message that they saw Jesus rejected with, and so they did; they preached repentance all around, and healed the sick, and expelled demons to people who needed it. Those disciples are back from their work; Understandably, they're tired. The text

says that the disciples were so busy that they hadn't had any time to eat yet. So Jesus seeks to give food and rest to his faithful workers by sailing away to a nice quiet place just for them.

But someone sees that Jesus is getting in a boat, and so he runs to catch him. Not only him but all the people from the surrounding villages join in to catch up to Jesus and the disciples.

***“But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.”***

Why? Why would you sprint around a sea on foot with all the people from the villages to meet Jesus on the other side?

*Jesus recognizes that all of these people have been running their own versions of the Big Dog's Backyard Ultra. But there's another group of people who are even more tired than they.*

These people have been searching and searching for some needed rest. Their whole lives have been draining their strength. Both physically, but more importantly, spiritually. Year after year, of making their way down to Jerusalem to make sacrifices to atone for their sins. Praying at certain times and fasting regularly. Making sure to avoid certain foods, so they didn't have to go to be purified.

All of them are trying to find some peace, some rest, in their own ways. By Remembering all the rules and the regulations that had been established by the Pharisees so that it could most likely make up for the bad, they had done. Perhaps just trying to outright ignore or deny the fact that they needed saving. Or using whatever they could to just forget about. But every time, the rest would be too short. Another mistake that had its consequences. Another sin that had to be attempted to be rectified. Another experience which said that they aren't worthy of a perfect God's love, only his wrath, and punishment.

And when Jesus sees this group of sinful people, exhausted, broken, hopeless. He does this:

***“When Jesus saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.”***

He has compassion on them. He sees an exhausted flock that is tired and scared with no hope of survival. And he gives them the rest that they need, the peace that he freely offers. The hope that he brings.

Jesus knew how tired those people were. He knew that there is nothing in the world that can fill that hole, that can give that peace, that can genuinely give rest that is needed. Because only Jesus can offer complete and total assurance that every sin doesn't need to be paid for

but has already been accomplished by him. That the belief in him doesn't give the possibility, but the guarantee of eternal life. Through a bit of time in a quiet place, only Jesus can provide them with rest from this world.

And what Jesus gave to those people on the shores of the sea, he offers to you too. Don't ever think that Jesus doesn't see or doesn't care about those battles that you fight. About the grinding race that you find yourselves in. The death spiral that you are falling in. Jesus knew his disciples were hungry and had compassion for them and wanted them to have time for themselves to eat and to rest. Jesus saw people desperate for some respite for their sins, and he wanted to give it to them. Jesus sees, and Jesus actively searches to find time to spend with you individually. To provide you with rest.

Often we think that the height of what Jesus wants is permanently active. A machine-like vigilance of working 110% all of the time, forsaking any comfort from our work. And grinding and grinding until death, that's what God wants. No, not at all. God wants you also to have rest. He wants you to have peace. Stillness. Calm. Confidence. He wants you to be diligent but also to enjoy the rest and comfort that he offers. Taking a break is not sinful. It's not harmful. It's something that our Savior has deemed as good.

Our God who has the entire world under his feet, who has the whole universe between his fingers. And he wants to give you rest. There is nothing that God has better to do than sit down with you in a quiet and solitary place and be with you in his Word. God himself wants to sit down with you and give you rest from your own terribly tiring race. He wants to teach you many things: of sins forgiven while you're sitting in your comfy chair at home; of divine protection on a blanket under a tree in the middle of a park; of life after death as you lie down ready to go to sleep. Jesus wants to give you lasting, nourishing, fulfilling rest in him.

Even though I know that most of you will never compete in the Big Dogs Backyard ultra, I do know that all of you run your version of it in your own lives. Every day you wake up and have to face the next loop. So as you get ready for the next loop. Take the time to rest in Jesus. Rest the body but, more importantly, the soul. Take your rest in a quiet place with Jesus. Amen.