

Thomas R. Cook
St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota
8:00 and 10:00 a.m. Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist
The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost; July 22, 2018

“A Good Tired: White Earth 2018”

Scripture: Mark 6:30-34, 53-56; 9 Pentecost B (Proper 11B RCL)
Note: Upon just returning Saturday from a week with the people of Rice Lake in White Earth Nation.

I am sooooo tired this morning! But it's a good tired.

So, to borrow an idea from St. Francis of Assisi... “It's no use [going] anywhere to [serve] unless our [going] is our [serving].”*

Most of you know I was with our church group this past week with the Native American peoples of White Earth in the community of Rice Lake. I was there with some fourteen of our St. Stephen's youth and a handful of adult mentors. It's a pretty long journey to Rice Lake... some four and a half hours by car, mostly north and a little west. It's a pretty large land up there, seems almost desolate in some places. You can drive for miles and miles and miles and never see another car, another person, a house or a gas station. Just trees and bogs and water and hills and a big, big sky. But peppered within the landscape are settlements... some tiny, some a bit larger. Where we go, most of the indigenous residents, or maybe I should say the

* Gleaned from [Synthesis](#) for July 22, 2018. Actual quote attributed to St. Francis of Assisi reads: “It is no use alking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching.”

descendants of the indigenous residents, live simple lives, often in pretty severe poverty, in mixed conditions of health, often quite isolated from the activity of the larger world around them. Families are large and fluid. Children may live with parents, or grandparents, or cousins, or an aunt or an uncle, or maybe they live packed a dozen or more into a small trailer with all of the above. Death is a pretty constant companion, whether from age, illness, addictions, or accidents. A lot of the kids know some friend or relative buried in the cemetery next to the church, sometimes someone younger than they are. The kids wander around on their own a good bit. There's not always a lot to do on the reservation, but they're looking for something to do. And that's where we come in...

"It's no use [going] anywhere to [serve] unless our [going] is our [serving]." When we go to White Earth, we don't take Bibles; we take crayons and coloring paper. We break bread every day, but not like in church with wafers and wine. The bread we break is usually covered in peanut butter and jelly or holding together a slab of bologna and cheese. No pews to sit in, just the floor of the local gym, or a kid-size chair by a well-worn table. Our tools for ministry are our bodies, and do we ever use them! Rice Lake children love piggyback rides. And basketball, and softball, and tag, and playgrounds, and coloring, and running in the water sprinklers. Our preaching is in our presence, our actions, our sharing, our touch, our tiredness. On our last full day with the kids, I saw Margaux Seiler just lying on the floor of the local church where

we held a cook-out, kids flitting all around her, and she said to no one in particular, “I’m so exhausted!” And then she got up again and picked up the little Rice Lake girl that had been attached to her for the past few days, and kept right on being a friend.

How tired was Jesus? I know he couldn’t go anywhere without be followed and accosted by the locals. News travels fast, even before the Internet, and once the word gets out that Jesus is a helper and a healer, he usually has people waiting for him wherever he goes. His tools for ministry? His body; his self. His touch, his words of compassion, or kindness, or challenge. And his work had to be draining. I sort of like to think that Jesus is the founder of the first *Employee Benefits Program*, because when his disciples come back from being out and about in the towns and villages serving and healing the people, he invites them on a little mini-retreat. “Come away to a deserted place,” he says, “all by yourselves and rest awhile.” Yet by the time their boat arrives at that place for rest, it is no longer deserted. The people have been watching for him, and they are already there. I remember one day last week at the local gym in Rice Lake, Mimi Beringer came in the door from some hot work outside, and before she got more than a few steps inside to cool down, a little girl came running over to her and slammed into her with a big hug, looking for some much needed attention. And she got it from Mimi. Even though she was tired.

Being with our youth at White Earth, it’s easy for me to imagine Jesus and his companions saying, “I’m so exhausted!” ...and then watching them wade into the

crowds to see what they could do to help... to hug the forlorn, to listen to their troubles, to share a bite to eat, to pray for them to get well, to hear the stories of their dead. To just be together. *‘It’s no use [going] anywhere to [serve] unless our [going] is our [serving].’*

Our new Youth Minister, Matt, did a wise thing with our Youth group. After a couple non-stop days with the Rice Lake kids, playing and eating and eating and playing, listening, chasing, carrying... did I mention playing?... during evening devotions, when we slowed down a little every day to consider what was done, Matt asked our group, “What is rest?” Is rest always doing nothing? Is rest always sleep? Or are there things we can do that are restful because they are rejuvenating? Things that may tire our bodies, but invigorate our spirits? Is that rest too? And our youth got it? Even as we were tiring, we were finding joy in being with others? Just when you thought you were completely spent, a child would come up and ask if they could help you clean up the gym after a long day, and of course you helped them help you. Or you made that extra trip to the supply room to get that banana you promised to a kid a half hour ago but just couldn’t get to it yet, but you hadn’t forgotten. Or you folded just one more paper airplane (to go with the dozens you had already made) for one little boy. Sure, it’s tiring. But the body may be tired, but the spirit feels pretty darned good.

No one can do every thing for every one. Physical rest is an absolute necessity. So, let's go ahead. Take that deep, cleansing breath. Right now. Quiet your mind. Rest for a moment here in the "beauty of holiness." Be at peace in the presence of the sacred. Greet your friends. Love your families. Share Holy Communion at the table of the Lord. Lay down your burdens awhile. Rest. Be refreshed; be renewed.

But, please, share yourself others when they need you. The needs are so great, the world so harried, broken, and distraught. For before long, if you are listening at all, you will be called upon to comfort someone, to pray for someone, to help someone, to suffer with someone, or rejoice with someone, or to speak out, to lie low, to struggle, to wonder, to heal. Whatever it may be. All these things can happen to you when you walk out that door. In fact, that's a big reason we are here... to walk out that door. And to take the blessings we receive in Jesus and give them away. It may be tiring, but it will be the best tired you have ever known.