

“Rest in Peace”  
a sermon by Eric A. Houghton  
Scripture:  
March 6:30–56  
Sunday, July 19, 2009

**Our Assignment:** To be truthful, I was nervous when he gave us our assignments. We were to go, two by two, into the villages *without* him. How could we do anything without our Master?

We were to travel light – taking no bag, no money, no food, not even an extra tunic. We would have to rely on the hospitality of those we met. But we would take two things with us:

① His message: “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.” We were to use his words but how inadequate we felt.

② His power, the power to heal those we touched, those we anointed. But we doubted we would be successful without him.

So off we went. He teamed me with Philip; we left Capernaum and turned away from the lake. It was a beautiful time in Palestine, mid–April, the green season. Lush grass covered the hillsides dotted with red, yellow, white flowers. It was delightful to walk, the dust had settled and the heat was fled.

**Time in the Village.** We entered the first village. When the villagers learned we were his followers, they readily offered us hospitality. A family gave us their home to use. They politely listened as we tried in our awkward way to talk about repentance and God’s coming kingdom.

They responded more enthusiastically when we told them we had also come to heal. The people thronged around us, and from before sunrise to long after sunset people clamored for our touch and our anointing. Miraculously, those we touched seemed different, seemed to be healed. We had scarce enough time to eat and little time to sleep.

Yet we were exhilarated – we sensed and saw God’s power, although we still understood so little of our Master’s work.

After a week, we, and the others, returned to him. I remember so well, that he looked me in the eye and said, “Andrew, well done, good and faithful servant.” I was at peace in his presence.

**Rest and Renewal.** He said we needed rest and suggested we take the boat to the deserted eastern shore for rest and renewal.

We entered the boat and left the clamoring multitude on shore. Immediately I felt tension drain away. As a fisherman, this was where I felt most at ease. The slapping of the waves, the creaking of the timbers, and the song of the wind brought sweet relief.

We drifted for a few hours, chatting about our experiences. We laughed and asked questions, and ate a bit. Slowly, languidly we rowed to the east.

**Teaching the Crowd.** When we approached the shore, my heart fell because instead of the

deserted place I expected, I saw a great crowd. There must have been hundreds, thousands of people who had somehow followed us. I felt we should seek another remote spot.

Yet he saw differently. He viewed this aimless group with compassion because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Later I realized that I have been a wayward sheep. Have you ever felt like a sheep without a shepherd?

So we landed. He gathered the crowd around him. For the rest of the day he taught them in his charismatic, authoritative way. He spoke of the kingdom, using vivid illustrations: the sower and the seed, hiding your light under a bushel, the mustard seed. The people were mesmerized.

Hours melted away, the sun neared the western horizon. We told him that we should send them away for shelter and food. But he said we would take care of the people.

About that time a young boy offered me his five barley rolls and two little fish. I gave these to the Master. You probably know the story. He took the bread and fish, he blessed them, he began to break them, over and over, until there was enough for everyone. We served the food and cleaned up afterwards. He had fed the people both spiritually and physically.

**Back in the Boat.** Then at sunset, he made us get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, where he would meet us later. So we left, but the boat felt empty without him. After we shoved off, he blessed and dismissed the crowd. He climbed the highest hill and entered into hours of prayer and solitude with his Heavenly Father.

Meanwhile we took our time in the boat, but later encounter strong head winds. We struggled without him; we would row a way and then the wind would push us back. We struggled for hours sharing the rowing duties but making little progress. We grew exhausted.

It must have been about three in the morning when we saw a figure on the water. Terrified, we thought it was a ghost, but we heard him: "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." When he got in the boat, I felt a sense of peace and the wind ceased.

When we landed at daybreak, we were not in Bethsaida but in Gennesaret – eight to ten miles from our original destination.

**Not Here but There.** Has that ever happened to you? You think you are going in this direction but you actually end up over here?

That was how it so often was with him. We thought we should do this, but he would say no we are going to do that.

We said let's dismiss the people to find their own food. He said no, we'll feed them.

We said, let's don't go to Jerusalem it is too dangerous, he would say that is where we are going.

We said, Lord put us at the head of the table in your kingdom and he would say the first must be last and serve all

He continually surprised us, and upset our assumptions and plans. How paradoxical it seemed.

I learned we were *not* in charge. If I submitted to him, if I surrendered my will to his will, I found *peace*.

**Shalom Aleichem.** Peace – “shalom” – was a word he used frequently. After he healed a person, he would bless them with the words “peace be with you” (“shalom aleichem”).

Once a violent storm assailed us in the boat while he slept. We were terrified and awoke him. He stood and said “peace, be still,” and immediately the storm ceased.

Once he told us, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

**His Presence = My Peace.**

I begin to learn that **his presence equaled my peace.** If he were present, I sensed peace. Even in the most chaotic of situations, with crowds thronging and demanding, he carried a sense of serenity that calmed us.

Our worst three days were in Jerusalem. You may know the story. He was arrested in the Garden, he was tried before Pilate, he was convicted and he was crucified. We scattered like frightened rabbits and hid behind locked doors. All seemed lost.

Sunday night, he suddenly appeared and his first words were: “Peace be with you.” “Shalom aleichem.” Peace and joy flooded through us. His presence was our peace.

After his resurrection, we were with him for forty days and he taught us many wonderful things. His final instructions were similar to our earlier assignment. He told us to go into the world to tell others about his gospel, and to care for and feed his sheep. He ended by saying, “remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” He promised his continuing presence.

In my life, when I am anxious, when I am far from peace, if I examine myself, I always realize that God is not then present. I have either turned my back or I have forgotten God or I have gone my own way or I have decided my will is best. On these occasions I am anxious, for he is no longer present within me. However, if I spend time in prayer and meditation, and if I surrender myself to him, then his peace returns.

I hope it is that way for you as well. If you surrender yourself, if you cultivate a relationship with God, if you carry his presence with you, then you will have peace, my friends. His spiritual peace.

As he said to us so often, those centuries ago “Shalom aleichem.” Peace be with you.

Amen.

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