

GETTING A BREAK

Mark 9:2-9

Five weeks of the semester have gone, just over halfway to spring break. It will be nice to have a break, especially after the grind of winter. Until then we can look for little breaks—weekends (even if they are often busier than the work week), a day of thaw in the weather, a week without tests or papers due, a chance to get out early from work, a date out with someone to watch the kids. Breaks are good when they help us—like a good night’s sleep, reading an engaging book, an interesting conversation with friends, or good family time. We all can use those breaks.

God knows that. He made our world that way by creating the earth in six days and then resting on the seventh. We too are to take a break each week to think about Him. We have years because it takes a year for the earth to go around the sun, days because the spinning of the earth happens each day, and months because of the month. But we have weeks because God commanded people to rest each week. God wanted us to have a break to rest in Him, a break that would really help us.

Jesus was nearing the end of His ministry on earth. He knew He was heading to his death on the cross. But before that He “took a break” and went up a mountain with Peter, James, and John. There He appeared in an amazing form, beaming with light. And Moses and Elijah, two of the biggest

heroes of the Old Testament, appeared with Him. It was better than the best tropical beach or ski slopes for spring break, better than a Final Four date for Cyclone basketball, better than the best retirement package. What a break!

But it had to end. Peter thought he had a good suggestion when he asked Jesus if they could make tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah to stay in and make the moment last. If ISU wins the Big-12 tournament who wants to rush away from the Spirit Center in Kansas City when you can stick around and sing “Sweet Caroline” with the pep band? Wouldn’t it be great to have two weeks off in March? But it has to end.

Jesus and the disciples had to come down from the mountain. He had to go through the valley of being rejected by His enemies and then to be abandoned by His friends. And most of all He had to face the cross when the only one He could really depend on—His Father—turned His back on Him. What kind of break was that for Jesus?

We too have to go back from our breaks. After a good night’s sleep comes a workday. Or if we get into that good book, the night’s sleep is cut short. Finishing a rest or paper leads to others. After spring break is the final seven weeks of classes. Then it is other semesters until there is work. After work is retirement; but often that is not so much a rest, but a necessity because we

can't do what we used to be able to do. Children grow out of diapers, but then we worry even more when they drive off to college or start a career or struggle with a bad marriage. And even if we can get a break from all the other problems we face, still death lurks, the one thing from which we can never get a break.

Jesus had that marvelous experience on that mountain, what we call the "Transfiguration." But it was not a break for Jesus. It was part of the journey He had taken from the moment He was conceived in Mary. And it wasn't going to end until He died on that cross. That is why He had to come down from that mountain. That is why He went on. He didn't get a break.

But the disciples did get a break. It might not have seemed like much of a break for Peter, James, and John when they watched their world crumble. They weren't surprised when Jesus faced opposition. They expected it. They even were willing to suffer and even die as Jesus began the revolution to restore the kingdom of David. But when Jesus didn't fit into their plans, when He did not rally the crowds to follow Him, when He allowed Himself to be arrested, they fled. What they experienced on that mountain seemed like a waste of time. Then Jesus rose on Easter. Then what confused them began to make sense. Then they could look back and see in the Transfiguration that Jesus really is God and that all He did accomplished God's goal of freeing us from sin.

We too get a break. Jesus took on death for us. He didn't get a break. He suffered eternal death for us. But we get a break from it. Death is not the end. Death does not mean eternal suffering for us, but the gate to a resurrection to eternal life—the ultimate break!

And in the meantime we get "breaks" now. Jesus appeared to those disciples in His glory on that mountain, a break from their "normal" experience. God gives us "break" from our normal experience by inviting us to gather with other Christians to hear His Word, be baptized, and join in the Lord's Supper. Each time we gather at church can be a mini "transfiguration" as the almighty God appears to us in what we can see, hear, and touch—water, bread and wine, and other Christian people.

The Transfiguration was a wonderful experience for those disciples. But that break didn't seem to do much for the disciples when Jesus got arrested. They fled in fear because Jesus didn't become the earthly king they thought He would. It seemed like a wasted "break," like spending a spring break in a crummy motel because our car broke down. But after Jesus rose on Easter they got to see what it was all about. God had shown them on that mountain that Jesus really is the promised one, the Son of God. And He came not to overthrow the Romans for the Jews, but to take away all the sins of the world.

So can our "break" seem to us. We don't necessarily feel all rested and secure after coming to church. In fact it may make

us miss the “break’ of sleeping in of having more casual time on weekends. And this Wednesday we add to that by starting Lenten services.

The Transfiguration was a break, not the stopping point. Jesus still had to go on to that cross. The disciples had to go on as well. They would have to go on after He left this world to go back to heaven. That journey would take those disciples to their own ends as they were executed for their faith in Jesus. But God provided them the “break” of the Transfiguration” and other “breaks” as they gathered together to share God’s Word and receive the Lord’s Supper. That gave them the strength to go on knowing that in the end they would not face eternal death like Jesus did, but eternal rest in heaven with Him.

That is why God gives us the “break” of church. It does not stop our journey. Like Jesus and the disciples we have to come down from the mountain and face the trials that sin causes in our lives. But unlike Jesus we are not going to eternal death on a cross, but eternal rest with Him. And we don’t just have “Sundays” as a chance to break. Anytime, anywhere we can pray. We can grab a Bible or devotional, find them on our cell phones, and let God speak to us.

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