

Chapter 6 is a busy chapter for Jesus and the disciples in the gospel of Mark. Jesus gets rejected at his home town of Nazareth, he sends his disciples out on a mission trip which turns out to be very successful, John the Baptist is executed, Jesus walks on water, he does a bunch of healings and he feeds a crowd of 5000 with just a few loaves and fish. Yes, it's a busy chapter.

Jesus has a pattern in his ministry. He does a lot of public work and then he withdraws from the crowds and spends some time apart and prays. Then he goes back into the crowds again. In our gospel reading we find Jesus and the disciples bombarded by the crowds never letting them alone.

It would be great if spreading our faith were like that today - people bombarding us to come to worship; overwhelming us to be a part of a community of faith. That would be a problem I'd gladly welcome! Even though that is not the case, this Bible text does have some important reminders for us.

Perhaps we aren't bombarded by people wanting to connect to Jesus, but we are bombarded by the world around us. I think

most of us live lives that are pretty, well, ...artificial. Our homes aren't caves or simple natural constructions like logs or stones. They are fabricated, from the concrete blocks to the sawmill cut lumber to the drywall and chemical paints and finishes. We do not get from place to place by walking, riding a horse or by some means of conveyance that exposes us to the elements. Our cars, even the smallest and cheapest, take us from place to place quickly, cleanly, and in protection from the weather.

Our roads aren't dirt. They're paved - after being graded and ballasted to smoothness with all the rough spots of terrain smoothed over, if not totally erased.

Do kids play soccer or baseball in a pasture? No. They play on leveled fields planted with grass.

Half or more of the social interactions people have are through social media, not face-to-face meeting.

Most of the housing developments around here are artificially created. The top soil is scraped off, the terrain is changed to suit the whims of the developer, we build our houses, and then put some of the topsoil back on. Building, lawns, landscaping, flower beds - all artificial.

Offices, factories, schools, cars - we go from building to building in our lives in the lighting we choose, at the temperatures we choose. Many people only go out in nature when the natural conditions suit them. Otherwise, they stay in human-created environments. When was the last time you were truly trapped outside exposed to the elements with absolutely no rescue possible?

I suppose there are psychological studies about the effects artificial lives have on people, but I'm not going to go in that direction. We are bombarded by human made creation. It presses in on us from every corner. How often do we take a break; get away from it?

When I say 'get away from it' I don't mean going out and giving a tree in a forest a big hug, or roughing it on a camping trip. I mean, how often do we step away from the human-made structure and schedule of the world and make time for God?

This is deeper than just asking, "How often do you come to church?" Because what do we do here? We worship in a very organized fashion, indoors, and on a schedule!

How often do you turn off all your senses and open yourself to God's nourishment? How often do you make sure there is adequate time for faith reflection, Bible reading, prayer, and devotions? Jesus did these sorts of things regularly. He encouraged his disciples to do it too. And he wants us to also.

There's nothing wrong with being a busy person. And there's nothing wrong with wanting the comforts and conveniences of modern life; as long as there is time for you to take with God discerning where you are going in life and why you are doing what you are doing. Otherwise you are sure to lose your way.

Taking time to be with God is like eating. Do you eat one meal a week and say, "Well, I'm good for another week." No, you eat every day, and a few times a day. If you don't eat, your stomach lets you know it, and how.

Spiritual nourishment is the same way. I fear all too many people are starving. But instead of turning to God for nourishment people replace it with more and more stuff from this world.

And when you eat, do you eat the exact same thing day after day every day. Do you eat oatmeal for breakfast every day, and

then oatmeal for lunch, and then oatmeal for supper each and every day? No, there is variety in your diet. At least I hope so! So there is a delightful variety to be found when we keep time open for God - whether it be spending time with Christian friends, or in meditation or scripture reading, or service to your neighbors or... on and on.

God invites us to a spiritual smorgasbord each and every day. There are flavors, textures, colors, and all variety of good things. God does not intend following Him to be boring. It is intended to be a deeply nourishing and fulfilling diet.

I encourage you to always make sure there is time for your spiritual nourishment. If you do and you find yourself bored, or you feel like it is a waste of time let me know. I can't give any guaranteed answers, but there are lots of resources available for those who look. Something is sure to nourish.

Let us be spiritually well fed so that we can do the work and run the race and know the satisfaction of a day well lived in service to purposes of our God. Amen