

# MY SOUL FINDS REST

Mark 1:29-39

February 8, 2009

**My soul finds rest in God alone;  
my salvation comes from him.  
He alone is my rock and my salvation;  
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken ....  
My salvation and my honor depend on God;  
he is my mighty rock, my refuge.  
Trust in him at all times, O people;  
pour out your hearts to him,  
for God is our refuge ....  
One thing God has spoken,  
two things have I heard:  
that you, O God, are strong,  
and that you, O Lord, are loving.**

My soul finds rest in God alone .... What about you? Does your soul need rest? My brother needs all the rest he can get. Because ... well, because he's a preacher. With two churches, mind you. Two buildings. Two budgets. Two finance committees. Two sets of year-end reports due on Monday. Last Monday, that is. And two

2  
times the preaching on Sunday morning. So he could use some rest... a good long vacation would do him some good. But it would have done more good about ten years ago, I think, when he had two churches not too far from here. In the land of Lincoln -- Lincoln County, that is. In the fair city of Hamlin. And believe it or not there are two Methodist churches there. The republican church up on the hill, of course. And the church for the democrats down in the valley. And my brother was pastor of the church on the hill. He had that church and another little church out in the country.

And I have to tell you that of all the people I've ever known in my life, my brother Ken is the most likely to have a really bad day. Which he does. Believe me. He has them all the time. Has them so often, I think, that he's *kind of* gotten used to it over the years. But ten years ago, when he was pastor of the church on the hill in Hamlin, West Virginia, he hit the mother lode and had a day he will never forget. (Because I won't let him. I can't. I just can't let it die.)

The church -- Trinity Church -- is lovely. It is. Kind of stately looking, as I recall. A red brick building with a big white steeple pointing up to the heavens. And stained glass windows on either side of the sanctuary. And right beside it, of course, was the parsonage. Pretty as a picture. And life there in Hamlin was good. He was happy there, I think -- as happy as he'd ever been. A good church full of good people in a wonderful little town.

But that Tuesday, late in December, was the day before New Year's Eve. And Tuesdays in Hamlin were pick-up days -- when the garbage truck came to pick up garbage. And for some reason, my brother remembered that. So early that morning, he set the garbage out where the garbage collector could get it. Two big plastic bags full of the stuff. And he set them there at the end of the driveway. He remembered to do that. Which is amazing, I think.

What he had forgotten to do, though, was to pick up some stamps at the Post Office on Monday. And he had some letters -- bills and things mostly -- that just had to go out. So he thought he 'd just run down the hill to

the post office, pick up some stamps, and mail them out while it was still 1998.

And he did. e grabbed his keys, hopped in his jeep, backed out of the driveway, and off to the post office he went. But what he didn't realize was that when he backed out of the driveway he backed right into those two big bags of garbage (that he had put there himself that very morning." He just ran right into them. And when he did, they got hooked on his back bumper somehow.

So that morning, my brother, the friendly parson, went driving through Hamlin with two bags of garbage just kind of hanging there on the back of his jeep. And as he drove along, they just kind of released what they were holding. And he spread his garbage from one end of town to the other. It's something Methodist preachers are often accused of, I'm sure. But this time there was proof. The garbage was spread from the parsonage to the post office. And my brother, Kenny, didn't have a clue. Didn't have any idea what had happened.

But other people had seen it. And when he got to the post office they told him about it. And he was shocked - - shocked and embarrassed. To think that he had just littered the whole town. So... he got in his jeep, went back to the parsonage, got one of those big Rubbermaid trash cans, and started gathering up all the garbage he had spread. From one end of town to the other.

It's not the kind of thing you see everyday -- a man in a necktie picking up garbage by the side of the road. And someone who happened by at the time saw this, I guess, and was rather amused. Rolled down his window and commented to my brother about the intelligence of the clergy in general, and of him in particular. Which didn't help things, believe me.

But finally Kenny gathered up all the garbage, put the trash can in the back of the jeep, and went home. And on the way home, of course, it tipped over. So he had to stuff it all back in the trash can again. And by that time, of course, the garbage truck had come and gone. So he got to keep it for another week. So he just sat it there in the garage.

And after all of that he just didn't feel up to whatever it was he had planned to do that day. He thought he'd just go in, have a nice cup of tea, and try to blot it all out of his memory for ever. But the door was locked. And the keys to the jeep were right there in his pocket. But the key to the house wasn't. It was inside where he left it. On the dining room table. But of course, he couldn't get to it because he was locked out.

And it was cold that day. It was freezing cold. And he was embarrassed already. He just felt like dirt. (Or like garbage. Even smelled like it, I think.) And now he couldn't even open the door. It was awful. Just awful. And all the doors and all the windows were locked, of course, he was sure about that. So he took off his shoe and broke out a window. And when he finally got in, he just sort of collapsed there in one of the chairs.

That evening, my sister-in-law decided to it might be good to get him out for a bit -- just to get his mind off things and do something pleasant. So they got into her car and they started to town -- to Huntington, I suppose. But before they got out of Hamlin, my sister-in-law remembered that she had gone into the basement

door early that morning and couldn't remember locking it behind her when she came in. So they went back. And sure enough, it was unlocked. And had been all day -- since early that morning -- even when my brother stood pounding the window with the heel of his shoe. The basement door was not locked.

So my brother started the new year with a broken window, a smelly jeep, and a terrible headache that just wouldn't go away. It was like the Book of Job "come to life" all over again. So you see, he could have used a little time off. A few days of rest for his weary, bruised, and aching soul.

But what about you? Does your soul need rest?

**My soul finds rest in God alone;  
my salvation comes from him.  
He alone is my rock and my salvation;  
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken ....**

My soul finds rest in God alone...

*Some* people thought Jesus did that, you know. Not that he went around spreading his garbage all over the place. Or maybe they did. Some people thought he was

making a mess of things, when it came to their faith -- that he was polluting the synagogues and trashing the things they had always believed. Because Jesus went from one end of town to the other preaching the gospel, he called it -- the good news about God. And he spread it around wherever he went, calling people to turn to God -- the God who loved them more than they could even imagine. But he didn't just preach with words. Saint Francis said, "Preach the Gospel at all times; if necessary use words." And that's what Jesus did. Everything he did was a sermon, a message that spread the good news.

In Capernaum he went to the synagogue to speak. And while he was speaking ... you know what happened. A man with an unclean spirit interrupted the service and start yelling at Jesus. And right there in the Lord's House, Jesus set him free from his demons. And it was a sermon without words. A message to everyone there and to everyone here that God's love is so great that nothing can separate us from him. Not even our demons. Not even those things that take over our lives and try to destroy us.

And after that, says Mark, Jesus went home with Simon Peter for Sunday dinner, I guess. Only their Sunday was Saturday. But when they got there they found Peter's mother-in-law in bed with a fever. And ... you know what happened. Jesus took her by the hand and lifted her up. And when he did, the fever left her and she was well -- so well, in fact, that she waited on them hand and foot. (I can just hear my mother-in-law. "Isn't that just like a bunch of men," she'd say. "They can't do a thing for themselves. Couldn't even let that poor woman rest." As if they had Jesus heal her just so she could fix them their dinner!) Ah, but it said something. It was a message, a sermon without words. "Nothing can separate you from God's love. Not even a fever. Not even illness and suffering and pain. God's love is so great that he won't let anything keep you from serving him."

That's what Jesus was spreading all over town. He was spreading good news, touching lives that were broken, and making them whole. And the thing that gets me is there were so many people who needed that touch. So many people who the grace and the wholeness Jesus was spreading.

Mark says there were so many of them that by sunset that evening the whole town was gathered there at the door. And Jesus spent the evening touching and healing and casting out demons. Can you imagine? My mother, the nurse, used to come home from the hospital exhausted -- drained and weary and just plain worn out. And Jesus was God in the flesh, mind you. But he was human, too. Just like one of us. And there were so many people and so much to do -- so many hearts and lives that were battered and broken.

But the next morning, well before daylight, Jesus got up and he went away from the house, and away from the crowds, and away from the noise and the chaos and all the things that just had to be done, to a quiet, lonely, deserted place. And he prayed... and he prayed. ✕ And later that morning, when the sun came up, they couldn't find him. And everyone started looking for Jesus. Because people were waiting. They wanted to see him. And you know where they found him? They found Jesus praying. "Everybody's trying to find you," they said. And Jesus said, "It's time to go. We need to move on so I can preach the good news. Because that's why I'm here."

It always amazes me to think how many people went out to see Jesus. The whole town was there when he went to Peter's that day. And later on in the second chapter, Mark says there were so many people crowding in around the house that no one could get near him. So four of them carried their friend up to the top of the house and made a hole in the roof just to get their friend to him. And at the lakeshore, one day, he healed and taught and touched more than five thousand people (not counting all the women and children there, mind you). And then he fed them. Every last one of them. And on the other side of the lake, Mark says he was with four thousand people. And it was probably twice that many, because they only counted the men! And it just amazes me that Jesus could do that -- that he could serve and love and preach to so many people, with or without words, without a vacation! Without any time off. Without any rest! But then I remember -- he did find rest. His soul found rest in God alone.

Albert Schweitzer, who was pretty busy himself, used to say that, "If your soul has no Sunday, it becomes an orphan." You know what he meant. If your soul has no Sunday, no Sabbath, no time to rest with

God in prayer, then you're ... you're just sunk. But for those who will make the effort to set aside some time just to be with God. Well, you heard what Isaiah said, **The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.**

That's his promise. Our souls find rest in God alone. For God is our strength. God is our help. God is our salvation, our hope, our wellspring, our fount. And Jesus our brother, God-in-the-flesh, invites us to come away with him to a quiet place that we may find rest and be restored and renewed to spread the good news of God's love to others. But let me tell you a little story, an old story from the south, just to show you what I mean.

A long time ago, on St. John's Island, just off the coast of South Carolina, some people from Africa who'd been labeled and sold as slaves, were working hard in the scorching sun picking cotton. And there was a young woman there with her little boy beside her. He was six, maybe seven years old. Out there in the hot sun. And his mother was working the fields, just working away. With one hand she picked the cotton and with the other she would caress the child's forehead. But after a while, she grew weary. She was exhausted and thirsty and weary to the bone. And the sun and the heat got to her, I think. And she fell down from the weight and the weariness of being abused and enslaved. And the boy tried to wake her up. Because he knew what would happen if the slave drivers saw her. They'd make an example of her and beat her and who knows what else.

So he tried to shake her and wake her up. And an old man comes over to him. An old man the Africans called Preacher, but the slave drivers called him Old Devil. And the boy looked up at the old man and he said, "Is it time? Is it time?"

And the old man smiled and he looked at the boy and said, "Yes!" And then he bent down and whispered into the young woman's ear who was there on the ground. And he said the words: "Cooleebah! Cooleebah!"

And at that very moment the boy's mother got up. And she stood straight and tall, full of dignity. She stood like a great queen and she looked down at her son, took his hand in hers and looked up toward heaven. And all of a sudden they begin to fly. And the slave drivers rush over and they see the slaves flying and they're confused. They don't know what to do! And while they're standing there befuddled, the old man around to all the other Africans and begins to tell them, "Cooleebah! Cooleebah!" And when they hear the word, they all begin to fly. Can you imagine? The slaves flying? The weak and the weary? The bruised and the broken? People weighed down and wounded -- people treated like garbage, used up and thrown out -- these people are flying? And at that moment the slave drivers grab the old man and say, "Bring them back!"

They take him and beat him. And with blood trickling down his cheek, he just smiles at them. And they say to him, "Please bring them back!"

And he says, "I can't."

They say, "Why not?"

He said, "Because the word is already in them and since the word is already in them, it cannot be taken from them."

The old man had a word from West Africa, Cooleebah, a word that means God. And that word had been placed into the heart of these displaced Africans. God had been placed into their hearts. And now they had dignity and strength.

And they would tell this story and pass it along among the slaves. And when they told the story, they would repeat the words of Isaiah: **The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but they**

**that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.**

Oh, my soul finds rest in God alone. He is my strength and my salvation .... **One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving.**

What about you? Are you weary and wounded? Is your heart weighed down with grief or worry? Are you broken and bruised in your heart -- in your spirit? Jesus invites you to spend time with him. To pray and feed on his Word. He invites you to come -- Come all who are weary and heavy-laden. And what does he say? I will give you .... rest.

This is the word which is given for you. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

Benen, ObLSB

