

Week 2: Finding Your (God) Happy Place

- I. Summer is almost upon us. So I ask us this morning, what is our happy place? What, you ask, is a “happy place”? Just in case you have been living on Easter Island for the past decade or so, according to the Oxford dictionary, North American Version, a happy place is “a place which is associated with happiness, visualized as a means of reducing stress, calming down, etc.; (hence) a happy state of mind.” Okay, let me give you some visuals. Is this your happy place or not? (**Images**) So why all this talk about happy places? This is not some California Cannabis festival or Dr. Phil show, right? Last week we began our series “Be Still...for a moment.” We are talking about how our crazy paced life is killing us physically by way of increased heart disease, diabetes, and stroke; it’s contributing to mental illness, including increased anxiety and depression; but most disconcerting is that our frenzied pace is eroding, if not outright destroying, our connection or relationship with God. As someone once said, “there is more to life than increasing its speed.” If we are Jesus followers, the point of life is not only being in relationship with Him but also using our gifts to help bring His kingdom (or way of life) to earth. And what does that look like? Not to embarrass Dianne Beals, but it looks like what she did by mentoring a young lady who had everything going against her, including losing her mom, a dad in prison, a child as a teen, and seeing her through graduating from High School this weekend. And if we are constantly just running from one event to another, we won’t have the time to do what Dianne did to live out God’s love. And we will miss why we were made. And this is where finding our happy place comes in, but not in the way the Oxford dictionary defines it.

- II. Let’s read a story from the gospel of Mark and see what we might learn. Before we do, just a little background. This is at the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry. He had just called his first disciples (or followers) and had begun his preaching and teaching tour throughout Galilee. The Galilee region of Israel was considered the countryside (**image**)....it would be more like Yadkinville or Elkin if we compare Winston to Jerusalem. Right before the Scripture we are going to read, Jesus had just preached a sermon in the synagogue (a Jewish house of worship) and exorcised a man possessed with a demon. Exorcised, not exercised. This is an important distinction. The first is giving Satan’s minion the boot; the other is sweating to the oldies á la Richard Simmons. That would just be weird. **Mark 1:29-39 NIV.** James and John, Simon and Andrew, all first disciples or followers of Jesus. They go to Pete’s house. Homes were multi-generation affairs back then. You almost never would have mom and dad living with just the kids, but also Gram and Gramps, as well as possibly single siblings, like Uncle Herb or in this case Uncle Andrew... which isn’t really that much different than now when kids go off to college and boomerang back to live in our basements and we end up taking care of elderly parents. So Jesus walks in thinking he could have a nice post-sermon Saturday brunch and a nap, when he is called to duty...to heal Pete’s MIL-Mother in Law. If I were Jesus, I would be thinking, “This probably means lunch is going to be late.” But this is Jesus we are talking about who can exorcise demons, so no problem. All it takes is Him giving her a hand and she is good to go. Poor lady, one sec she is on her death bed, and the next she is having to whip up a buffet for some hangry disciples. By the time lunch is over and the dishes are done, the Jewish Sabbath has ended (which is from sundown

Friday to sundown Saturday) and the crowds come knocking. They know now about Jesus' miracles, so He can't catch a break. Like the old saying goes, He has "work from can't see to can't see", but in Jesus' case it goes even beyond. So what does he do the next morning? Sleep in and have a vanilla cappuccino latte with skim milk around mid-day while watching "tivoed" episodes of the late show? No, Jesus gets up before the chickens....and goes to His happy place. A quiet mountainside. Where is that you ask? A place where he could "reduce stress, calm down and get in touch with his inner self?" Not sure about the last part but I am sure that it was very calming, being away from the crowds and chaos. But what I think the Scripture is stressing is not primarily about Jesus finding "me" time but finding God the Father time. Time to "be still and know" as we talked about last week. Not just "know", as in having intellectual knowledge that there is a Loving All Powerful Divine Being in the Universe; but know as in wanting to experience and sense God's presence and goodness. For example, I can look at this waterfall (**image**) and intellectually be aware that it would be very cold, powerful and, well, wet to go stand under it. But I would know it at a completely different level if I actually took the plunge and stepped under it. That is what Jesus did that early morning. He stopped and stepped into still...His Father's presence...in a deep and profound way through prayer. This was Jesus' happy place, and frankly it needs to be our happy place too if we are going to take our Jesus following seriously. Let's be real. If Jesus needed to stop and step into His Father's presence, how much more so do we?

- III. But this didn't last for long did it? Simon and friends once again crash the party and Jesus is back to the grind carrying out His Father's mission to the world. So what do we do with this Scripture and how does it fit into our "Be Still (for a moment)" series? Let me share a truth about marriage. In a good marriage both husband and wife will be changed by the other. For example, before marriage, I used to be early wherever I went. Since marriage, I am on time or maybe a little late wherever I go. Before marriage, I barely knew my primary colors. After marriage to an artist, I know the color chartreuse. Before marriage, I was not exactly on the cutting edge of fashion. And after marriage...well okay, maybe some things haven't changed but you get my point. But one thing that hasn't changed with my beloved bride is when it comes to gas. No, not that type of gas but fuel for the car. Megan, ever since I have known her in college, has always lived on the edge when it comes to the fuel gauge. I can't tell you how many times I borrowed her car while at Furman (as I didn't have my own, hear that kids!!) and she was not only on E but like far "west" of E. Like almost off the dial. It was amazing that her car could even get out of park. It was like her car had its own fuel fairy or gas guardian angel! It constantly ran on fumes. So the very first thing I would always have to do is drive it to closest gas station, praying the whole time. I was never really sure if this was merely an oversight on her part or really a brilliant way to supplement her income by taking advantage of her lovesick suitor. But the thing is, she still does it!! Fortunately, it's one of her only annoying traits, and I more than make up for it in the marriage with many of my own. But here is the thing. Sooner or later, a car on E will run out of gas and die on the side of the road. No matter how lucky one may be. It's just a fact, Jack. In the same way, if we, like Jesus, don't get re-fueled...or, going back to our earlier analogy, find our God "happy place" to be still and experience Him...we are spiritually going to end up on empty. Our Jesus journey is going to run out of gas. We are going to become spiritually dry. How

will we know this? Here are some symptoms. We will begin believing the lie that this world is just about finding our personal happiness in our stuff and our personal success. We will forget about caring for the poor, the hungry, the homeless, the addicted and those who feel far from God. We will fail to recall why we were made and lose our greater purpose. Worship on Sunday morning will become merely an obligation rather than something we get to do...or we simply will cease it altogether. We will grow cold of heart and tight of fist with our money. We will feel disconnected from God and likely from those we love most. This is what running on E looks like and feels like as a Jesus follower.

- IV. Now I imagine if you have been a Christian for some time, you already know this. We need to be praying, reading Scripture, and finding ways to connect with God...or find our spiritual happy place...on a regular basis. But here is the problem. As we talked about last week, we are too busy. We just have too many things going on in our lives to do it. Right? Well, this morning I am going to help by offering a secret word that very few people ever use these days. And it has amazing power. It has the ability for you and me to find our spiritual happy place every day if we would only utter these two letters. Sometimes we need to say it to our boss. Sometimes we need to say it to our family. A friend. A child. But mostly we will need to say it to ourselves. Any guesses what this almost magical word may be? **NO (image)** I know this is very hard for us Americans to say, so let's practice it. Ready? "NO". "Hey Clyde, would you be willing to take on that extra work project even though you already work 80 hours a week? NO! Trish, could you serve as the VP of the PTA even though you are already on 7 other committees? NO! Dad could I sign up for my fifth sport even though the last time we all sat down for a family dinner was at Thanksgiving? NO! Mom, could you take me to the mall for the sixth time this week. NO!" And then there is the self. "Hey self, how about we spend 3 hours this evening taking buzz feed quizzes on important things like which Disney princess I am most like? NO! Hey self, how about we marathon the Walking Dead until 3 am in the morning. NO! Hey self, how about we sign up all five of our kids with at least three actives each this summer? (Heaven forbid we actually have a second to breathe.) NO. NO. and NO!!!!!" If we learn to actually say it, it can truly change our lives!
- V. I know what you might be thinking..."but Ron I can't say no. Sure I can say no to some of the social media stuff but with the sports and activities, no. I can't say no!" Well, if it didn't embarrass my wife so much I would show you a picture of my closet. But let's say it looks kind of like this. **(image)** For a man, I confess I have an overabundance of clothes. In my defense, I didn't buy most of them. They were given to me. But still, they fill up my closet. I do have my favorites. For example, I have a trusty black shirt that I just love. I like the feel of it and it's cool. I mean it keeps me cool...but I am not sure if it's "cool, cool." But the thing is that it's showing its age. Hole in the back and well, not to be over the top, but there are stains in the pits. And there are dozens like this. But for me, to get shirts that won't embarrass my family when I wear them, some need to go. My closet can fit only so many. They need to head to the great hamper in the sky. Here is the principal in this. **We have to say "no" to a good thing** even no to a favorite shirt **to make room for a better thing**, in this case hole-free clothing. Jesus did this all the time in the gospels. **He had to say no to one thing** even potentially healing someone or teaching another lesson **so he could say yes to a**

better thing...like spending time with His Heavenly Father. Otherwise He would have run out of gas. I think most of us would agree that we do need to be still and step into experiencing God's presence each day. Have times of intentional prayer and stillness before our Creator. But in order to do this, we must say "no." Or we too will run out of gas spiritually. So what might this be in your life? I cannot answer that. Maybe it's reducing your time on social media. Maybe it's not watching the late show so you can get up 15 minutes early. Maybe it's not having your kids involved in so much. Only you can answer this. Just like I am limited by the size of my closet, we are all limited by the size of our days. No matter what we do, there are only 24 hours in each. So we need to fill them with what's most important....and push out the good to make room for the best.

- VI. In John Ortberg's book *Soul Keeper* he tells the following story. There once was a town high in the Alps that straddled the banks of a beautiful stream (**image**). The stream was fed by springs that were as old as the earth and deep as the sea. The water was clear like crystal. Children laughed and played beside it, swans and geese swam on it. You could see the rocks and the sand and the rainbow trout that swarmed at the bottom of the stream. High in the hills, far beyond anyone's sight, lived an old man who served as Keeper of the Springs. He had been hired so long ago that now no one could remember a time when he wasn't there. He would travel from one spring to another in the hills, removing branches or fallen leaves or debris that might pollute the water. But his work was unseen. One year the town council decided they had better things to do with their money. No one supervised the old man anyway. They had roads to repair and taxes to collect and services to offer, and giving money to an unseen stream-cleaner had become a luxury they could no longer afford. So the old man left his post. High in the mountains, the springs went untended; twigs and branches and worse muddied the liquid flow. Mud and silt compacted the creek bed; farm wastes turned parts of the stream into stagnant bogs. For a time no one in the village noticed. But after a while, the water was not the same. It began to look brackish. The swans flew away to live elsewhere. The water no longer had a crisp scent that drew children to play by it. Some people in the town began to grow ill. All noticed the loss of sparkling beauty that used to flow between the banks of the streams that fed the town. The life of the village depended on the stream, and the life of the streams depended on the keeper. The city council reconvened, the money was found, the old man was rehired. After yet some more time, the springs were cleaned, the stream was pure, children played again on its banks, illness was replaced by health, the swans came home, and the village came back to life.
- VII. The point? The life of the village depends on the health of the stream. The stream is your soul. And you are the keeper. For us to keep fueled for the journey, we must meet with Jesus, find our God happy place on a regular basis...which means we are going to have to cut out some things, even good things. so we can make room for the best things. This will keep us fueled up for our Jesus journey and prepared to live out our God given mission in this world.

Challenge: Say no to one thing each day this week so you can say yes to spending time with God.