

## **“The Place of Quiet Rest”**

July 9, 2017

A Sermon by the Rev. John C. R. Silbert at Trinity Presbyterian Church; Butler, Pennsylvania  
The Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

*Text: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*

Matthew 11:28-29; NRSV



[Image Credit: John C. R. Silbert, “Chocorua Island Chapel, Big Squam Lake, New Hampshire”, August 2015]

Let us pray: Our Father and our God make us masters of ourselves that we may become the servants of others. Take my lips and speak through them; take our minds and think through them; take our hearts and set them on fire, for we would see Jesus this morning, in his name and for his sake, we pray, Amen.

What is it we look for; listen for . . . hope for when we begin to put our vacation plans together? Air conditioning! No Cooking! No bosses to hassle us . . . No employees to worry us . . . A long break from classes . . . A chance to experience something new! Lying in the sun; sitting in the shade; sand between my toes, sunscreen on my nose – music, dancing! Peace and quiet!

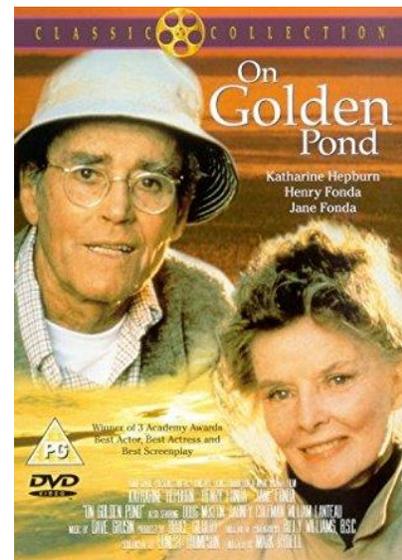
One person’s idea of vacation is another’s idea of someplace else . . .!

The Silberts always got away from home when we took vacation. My Dad, like most ministers, had four weeks of vacation a year; we took them together as a family every August – without exception to Squam Lake, New Hampshire. The picture that heads up the bulletin cover and the frontispiece for this sermon (above) is one I took two summers ago at one of the many



islands that dot Big Squam Lake. Chocorua Island is also known as "Church Island" because it is the site of an outdoor chapel where services are held every Sunday in the summer months. The view of my picture is of the Pulpit and Altar in front of a large

birch-wood cross overlooking Big Squam (the larger of two lakes connected by a river in the town of Holderness. The chapel is the location for many services: weddings almost every weekend in the summer, regular Sunday worship, and an occasional funeral. Both of my parents' ashes were scattered about ten boat lengths out beyond the cross . . . Squam Lake is a special place to us! Years ago it was the location of the movie "On Golden Pond", starring Henry Fonda and Katherine Hepburn. We watched some of the filming when we had our time there that August.



Some of the folks we knew never understood why we always went away to the same place every year; some said, "They behave more like birds than human-beings flocking to the same place every year! Why don't they go somewhere new?" The people who said these sorts of things were often the ones who never went anywhere on their vacations – and not because they couldn't either!

When I lived in Rhode Island, as a teenager, I was amazed at the number of kids I knew who had never travelled out of the state! You might imagine a few here in Pennsylvania living that way, after all it is a big state! But Rhode Island is so small: 52 miles long and 38 miles wide;

not much bigger than metropolitan Pittsburgh . . . I took my wife, Elaine, on a "date of the state" once when we were visiting family. We left in the late morning from my sister's home in Lincoln (in the Northwest corner); travelled east to Barrington (passing into and out of Massachusetts on the way); then South to Newport for clam chowder and lobster rolls for lunch; then West to Charlestown; then turned North through Wickford, Warwick, Cranston and Providence, arriving home in time for supper! . . . And one of my school mates had never gone beyond the state line – in his life! "Why?" I asked. "'Cuz," he replied, "My Dad says we got everythin' right here (pronounced without any discernible "r" sound). We don't have to go somewhere (again, no "r") else to say we had a good time on vacation . . ."

. . . Maybe that's the important thing about taking a vacation – taking the time to let it happen! We often get so wrapped up in ourselves and what we are doing that we fail to take the time away from the routine to rest and be quiet in the ways that will benefit us.

God, himself, rested after the labor of creation – setting aside the seventh day to himself – for himself – and made it holy. There are not many days left to the average family that haven't also been fragmented by activities, work days, and other diversions . . . We must hold on to the day that is holy in our tradition – the first day of the week when Christ arose, for it is the Lord's Sabbath Day when the work of salvation in Christ Jesus was completed – what many in our tradition call "*the eighth day of creation*"; for in Christ's resurrection from the dead, he has established a new creation! We need to hold the line against the things which encroach upon this day that seek to make it like any other . . . The fact is, we need to rest from the paces of our lives and find a chance to recover our senses, ourselves and our spirits.

There came a time in the life of the prophet, Elijah, when things became too hectic in his life (see 1 Kings 19): false gods and false prophets were everywhere; he had domestic political troubles with Israel's King Ahab and his evil Queen, Jezebel; he seemed to be all alone and

fighting an uphill battle, so he fled into the wilderness – as much to save his sanity as to get away from it all. . . And only after days of being replenished with food and rest – sent by God to him – did God finally ask Elijah, in a still small voice, what he was doing there . . . The impression I get in reading this story of Elijah’s flight into the wilderness is that even though he was running away from his duty as God’s prophet in the land – he needed to get away! ; To rest and be restored in order to have strength to go again into the midst of his calling. The fact is, God ministered to him there in the wilderness as if Elijah were a guest at an out-of-the-way inn and come to spend the time. When God finally broke the silence with Elijah, it was not in the winds of a tornado; nor in the rumbling crash of an earthquake; nor was it even in the hot whipping and crackling heat of the inferno; but God spoke to him in a still small voice; in the sounds of gentle stillness (1 Kings 19:9-13).

Even Jesus took the time to get away from it all: whether it was the time he took after his battle with the adversary – *“when the angels came and ministered to him”* (Matthew 4:11) – or the times when, in seeing the crowds of people who crushed around him, he stepped into a boat and paddled to the uncrowded middle of the Sea of Galilee (e.g. Mark 6:31-32), or even the occasions when he went out alone in the pre-dawn hours for prayer (e.g. Mark 1:35), or went with his disciples up into the Mount of Olives overlooking the stillness of Jerusalem under a midnight moon (Mark 14:26); even Jesus took the time to find the quiet place of rest.

You and I have a need to flee sometimes; to go up into the mountains of our life’s experience to find the place of quiet rest. We are often pressed on all sides and need a break; a chance to reclaim what is ours in body, mind, and spirit. It is important for us to make the journey to a place of quiet rest, for when we do, he is there waiting for us, to renew us, and strengthen us for the tasks that wait for us; tasks that he calls us

to do in time. Jesus said to his disciples, *"Come to me, all you who labor and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"* (Matthew 11:28-29).

We can think of many things vacation is or isn't, but it should always be a time of renewal in the body, mind, and spirit . . . Be sure that you, indeed, make plans to find the time for vacation: whether that means for you a trip to your own "Golden Pond", or a ride on your front porch swing. And then be very sensitive to the still small voice of God speaking to you in the quiet place of rest; the sound of gentle stillness stirring your very soul.

*"How lovely is thy dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!  
My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the LORD;  
My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God . . .*

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*Blessed are (they) whose strength is in thee,  
in whose heart is the highways to Zion.  
As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs;  
the early rain covers it with pools.  
They go from strength to strength . . .*

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*O LORD of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in thee!"  
(Psalm 84:1-2, 5-7a, 12, RSV)*

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.