

Christ Episcopal Church
Sermon for Pentecost X – August 2, 2026
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Back when I was in college, my roommates watched the show 24. Each episode of the show covered one hour of one day of the main character's life in real time. Jack Bauer, the hero, had a life that, at least on THAT day, was not one I'd want. However, it was inspiring to see how his character navigated the challenges in "real time". Though I admire Jack's courage, "you remind me of Jack Bauer" isn't something I aspire to hear.

My actual favorite show is The Chosen, which dramatizes Jesus' life and ministry. If The Chosen was to make a version of 24 with Jesus as the lead, a great choice for source material would be Matthew 14. As written, Matthew 14 covers one 24 hour period of Jesus' life. In this single day, Jesus learns of the death of his cousin and ministry partner, John the Baptist, heals dozens, feeds the 5,000, spends a night in prayer, walks on the water, and calls Peter out to him on the waves. As the hours pass, we watch a grieving yet composed man of mercy balance caring for the lost sheep of Israel with tending his own hurting heart. As we watch Jesus, we can be his disciples and learn from him.

In hour 1, John's disciples break the news to Jesus: John was beheaded by Herod's court. Jesus and John were cousins. They may have also grown up in the same worship community. John was a literal and spiritual family member to Jesus. This loss cut deep.

Remember a time when you received news that shook you to the core. What were the needs of your heart at that moment? Jesus' relationship with God affected his grief experience. He was aware of the eternal nature of the soul and probably felt John's continued presence with him. Yet, like us, Jesus experienced life in a physical body. He missed the physical presence of John. Jesus teaches us that as long as we are souls in physical bodies, we will grieve. Grieving is a necessary and healthy process.

Hour 2: Jesus follows his heart and moves to a space where he can fully feel his emotions. He takes a boat and goes to a place where he can be alone. Grief must be felt, moved, and processed through the body. Grief buried can spiral, forming knots within us. Jesus knew he needed time to cry, to pray, and to feel his father's love. Only in processing this pain could he continue to be of highest service to others. For Jesus, self-care and time with God are His number one priority. When we face challenges in life, where do we look first?

Hour 3: This is where life gets real. We have these great plans, plans that are aligned with what we know of God's will. And then life happens. In episode 3 of "24: Jesus Edition", someone catches wind of where Jesus' boat is heading and crowds follow on the shore. They probably arrive shortly after Jesus, hoping to receive the healing they

know Jesus can provide them. The situation is beyond Jesus' control. What is within his control is his God-directed response. Jesus could turn the crowds away and take his time to grieve. Or, he could trust that His Father would provide the energy for that day and provide time resting in God's love later. Jesus chooses to lean into the moment of service in nonresistance and trust.

Consider the implication for us here. Jesus modeled two important qualities. First, that he prioritized his soul's well-being and relationship with God. This is counter to many of our human natures. Many of us will jump on any opportunity to avoid quiet with God. We choose to avoid stillness when we most need it. Jesus chose quiet with God each morning, starting the day with only His Father's presence whenever he could. His routine was to put listening first. This yielded two gifts. The first is that when the news of John's death broke, Jesus' instinct was to run to His Father with it. The second gift is that Jesus developed the ability to hear God's guidance in the moment. When his plans were interrupted, he could pause and listen to what God was asking. Jesus could feel God calling him to shift plans and serve the people in that moment.

Again, the first quality Jesus models is prioritizing our relationship with God above all else. The second quality is Jesus' trust in his Father. Though Jesus knew he needed time for healing, he trusted that God would provide it in God's timing. Jesus entered into the day of service confident that God would provide the presence and power needed for the day. And, at the day's end, God would give Jesus peace.

Hours 4 through 9. Jesus spends a long stretch of the day healing the sick of the crowd. I can imagine that even though Jesus trusted in God's guidance and power through him, by the end he probably felt emotionally tired.

Hour 10: It's getting late and the crowds are getting hungry. At this point, the disciples caught up to Jesus and the crowds and they could read the proverbial room. Jesus is tired and didn't get the healing time he was hoping for. The crowd is getting hangry. Like good friends, they advocate for Jesus. "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." (Matthew 14:15). In other words, "This seems like a good time to wrap things up." But Jesus, once again heeding his Father's voice, not man's, has other plans.

"They need not go away; you give them something to eat." (Matthew 14:16). Sometimes I read this as a very human moment of being pushed to the limit. "YOU give them something to eat". But that's just me projecting my emotions onto Jesus. Jesus isn't attacking his disciples, he is empowering them.

Sometimes when we are pushed to our limit is the perfect time to allow others to step into their power. Jesus is maxed out. This was the ideal time to challenge the disciples to take on a little more. Maybe, like when we ask our youngest children to take on a

household task for the first time, it ends up being more work than if we had just done it ourselves. But this was a learning opportunity. They were given the opportunity to step as far into leadership as their abilities would allow. Off they went, and they returned with a few fish and a few loaves of bread and no clue how to make it stretch to feed the crowd.

Hour 11: Like the parent watching their kid struggling to pick the egg shells out of the cake batter, Jesus knows the disciples are at a loss with what to do. With the wisdom of a good teacher, he takes over for a bit. He blesses the meal, and hands the loaves and fish back to the disciples. It's back in their hands again. They pass the food out to the crowd. Once again, Jesus involves the disciples as much as possible, inviting them to be a part of the miracle and learn through doing. Where can we, in our exhaustion, give others opportunities to step into their power?

Hour 12: The people fed, Jesus' work for the day is complete. The next word in Matthew 14:22 is "Immediately".

"Immediately, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray."

The moment his day of service is completed, Jesus runs into his father's arms. There isn't a delay for a relaxing TV show or to vent to the disciples about the day he had. Jesus goes "immediately". The other key word in his verse is "made". Jesus "made" the disciples get into the boat. The Greek word used here means "compelled". Jesus didn't seem to give them a choice. Enough is enough. Disciples and crowds both needed to go. As soon as Jesus got the thumbs up from God, nothing was going to stop him from his time of prayer. How quick are we to find escape in our exhaustion in something else besides God?

Hour 13-21: All night, Jesus is alone on the mountainside, wrapped in his Father's love. This would personally be my favorite part to watch if Matthew 14 was made into a tv series, but I suspect the ratings wouldn't be very high.

Hour 22: A bit before dawn, Jesus is now filled up from his time away. He walks out to the disciples on the water. Up until now we have focused on Jesus' perspective. Consider that of the disciples. They too are mourning the loss of John the Baptist. They experienced the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 and then were shoved by Jesus out onto the water on a rough weather night. They may have felt abandoned or cast aside by Jesus at that moment, not able to see the full picture. They certainly weren't sleeping restfully. They are awake in the late night hours to see Jesus walking towards them. When we feel abandoned by God, God is doing something wonderful in the background.

Because of Jesus' choice to pull away for the night, the disciples witnessed the miracle of walking on the water. Because of Jesus' choice, Peter walked out on the water to Jesus and strengthened his faith. Finally, because of Jesus' choice to prioritize His well-being and relationship with God above all else, all in the boat witnessed the calming of the wind storm by their rabbi.

Sometimes when we pull away from those we love to be with God, it feels like we are ignoring their needs. When we align ourselves with God's will, God has a way of working things out for the good of all.

Hour 23 and 24: Maybe, just maybe, Jesus and the disciples slept.

What does it take to face our most difficult days like Jesus? First, we build up our souls and nurture our relationship with our heavenly Father by starting everyday with extensive time with God. This practice is a protection against running away from processing the tough stuff when it comes up. It provides training in hearing God's voice so that we can ascertain His will in the moment. When we, like Jesus, need to decide the Father's will, we can better hear His guidance. Finally, prioritizing our connection to God strengthens our stamina to serve.

Second, we trust God to guide our steps in the moment. We pivot from our best laid plans of self-care to serve. Additionally, we are equally willing to turn from service to self-care at God's direction. We lean into opportunities to allow others to step into their power and to be blessed directly by God when we step away to nurture ourselves.

May our toughest days be as Spirit-led and ministry-filled as Jesus' as we learn what walking with God looks like from the one who knew it best. Perhaps one day someone will say of us: "You remind me of Jesus."