

Pent8_Prop11B_072212_mcr
All Saints Episcopal Church

He said, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest for awhile."

For almost two years, from the day of their calling until he first sent them out in pairs, the apostles had not left Jesus' side as they witnessed him perform miracle upon miracle.

They watched as he drove out evil spirits, healed one person after another, cleansed a man with leprosy, healed a paralyzed man, casted out demons, saved a girl from dying, and healed a bleeding woman, just to name a few.

He told them many parables, teaching them how to further their mission, and to understand the kingdom of God.

These twelve stuck by Jesus' side-- apprentices to his healing and restoring ways, caught up in the excitement of who Jesus was and what he was doing, and what he was teaching....

But then it was time...

Jesus sent them out to do the work they had witnessed in him. He sent them out two by two, and they took with them the authority to cast out demons, to anoint the sick, to cure broken bodies, to teach people about the kingdom of God.

When they came back to Jesus, they told him all about their experiences. Imagine it: six pairs of disciples. Six sets of stories. Six accounts of their time away. There must have been tender stories, hair-raising stories, heart-wrenching stories, funny stories. Children healed, adults shouting for joy, teenagers following them to the far outskirts of town, the curious and the quizzical plying them with question after question about this Jesus of Nazareth in whose name they had come.

All those people. All those problems. All that talking and preaching, anointing and praying, sun and heat and dust. We don't know the full extent of their efforts, but of this we can be fairly certain: when they returned, they must have been tired. Small work, great work—it's still tiring. Holding the door or holding the sacrament. Proofing the bulletin or preaching the sermon. Meeting in committee or ministering

to the dying. Heat is exchanged, effort expended. Power goes out of you, and, like Jesus, you feel its departing.

Jesus recognized the tiredness written all over their faces and responded. Come away for a while, he said, and rest. I know a place close by—just across the lake. A deserted place, the NRSV reads. A desert place. Otherwise translated 'wilderness' or 'desolate place.'

Now the desert is a dangerous place. Almost nothing grows there, so there is almost nothing to eat. In the daytime it is hot and the sun scorches your skin. In the night it is cold. When the wind blows, the sand stings when it hits you. People wear many clothes to protect them from the sun and blowing sand. The desert is a dangerous place. People do not go into the desert unless they have to.

Some invitation! You're tired, you're spent, you've given everything you have. For relaxation and rejuvenation, why don't we go out into the desert, fend off snakes and scorpions, get hot, hungry, and dehydrated, then crawl back home. Not exactly our idea of a good time, is it? (I'd rather be at a hotel with a free breakfast bar!) At this point in the church year, Lent is either behind us on the calendar, or way down the road, depending on how we prefer to look at austere things. We'd just as soon reserve the struggle in the desert for that serious season. July is rugged enough without summoning even more wilderness.

Besides, even if, for some reason, wilderness is our idea of a good time, we're way too busy to "come away for a while." Jesus surely knows this better than anybody. Remember that Mark is the Gospel of urgency. *Immediately* is one of his favorite words. From the very first pages of this revved-up review of Jesus' life, everything happens quickly. *Immediately* Jesus went. *Immediately* the Spirit drove him out. *Immediately!*

What does Jesus mean, "Come away for a while . . ."? We've got work to do—*immediately!*

Well, Jesus means just what he said.

There is a concept that has been around as far back as St. Augustine (or perhaps farther) that states that every person has a void in his or her soul/spirit/life that can only be filled by God. This 'God-shaped void' is the innate longing of the human

heart for something outside itself, something transcendent, something 'other.' It is a longing for quiet, for vacancy, for listening, for stillness, for rest. We often try to deny that urge, ignore it, drug it, cover it up, suppress the instinct to fill that void. We're too busy for solitude, we say. We don't have the personality for quiet time. We can't afford the expense of going off somewhere to rest. We believe in praying as we work, staying in touch with God all through the day. No time for such extravagances as time apart.

To fortify the argument, Madison Avenue lends a hand, leading us to feel that every inch of time and space must be plastered with another sight or sound, another experience, another amusement, gadget, beverage, pill, or snack break. And the church has its own way of blessing that message: hurry up and bring the kingdom, finish the work, fill up the pews and coffers, achieve megachurch status. There's so much to be done. There are so many lives to be reached. Come away? In your dreams! Time's a-wasting!

We're good at multitasking, giving our attention to two or more activities at once. We pride ourselves on being busy, too busy. We crowd our day planners and scheduling gadgets, fill idle seconds with cell phone calls or text messages. Aren't we good?

Meanwhile, the inner pursuit will not relent—we still search for ways to fill the void. For quiet time, quiet space. Jesus knows that that quiet time, that quiet space will give us the chance to fill up the space meant for God. We can't give of ourselves like we are asked to do if that space is empty.

We need to rest. We need to be honest with ourselves about how much time we spend together, or spend outdoors, or even spend enjoying all the things we've worked so hard to attain. We need to know that God desires more for us. Life - abundant life - does not consist of merely more and more and more; 'abundant' ultimately is not a quantitative term but a qualitative one.

So I would like you to do yourselves a favor: think about one thing that you will *not* do this week - maybe one evening you'll shut down the computer or turn off your cell phone, or not make that extra shopping trip to the mall. But don't stop there; think about one thing you will actually *do* this week in order to rest, such as take a walk with a friend or spouse, or play a game with a child or neighbor, one opportunity you will take to sit, alone or with others, not in front of the TV but

simply to contemplate your blessings so that you will be able to go to bed that night content and grateful.

Write these down if you need to. It won't necessarily be easy. We may find ourselves in the wilderness. Many of us may have to give up some of the destructive yet oddly attractive habits we've acquired. But who knows, along with what we lose, we may just fill our God-shaped void and find our lives again.