

Trinity 7 (Proper 11) Year B

Ephesians 2. 11-22 and Mark 6. 30-34, 53-56

'Come away and rest awhile'

It's holiday time! The children have broken up from school and there is an air of the expectation of long, hot summer days seemingly extending for weeks on end. Or at least that's the way I remember summer holidays when I was a child.

It was endless days of sunshine and the evenings seemed to stay light until at least 10pm even into September. In reality this of course is not so – we are already a month into the nights drawing in, (and I don't think I dare mention the 'C' word – Christmas – only another six weeks and the Selection Boxes will be on display! Let's not go there.) Holidays are indeed a time for a break from our normal, everyday lives of going to work/school, coming home, eating, sleeping, and then doing it all again day after day. Even housework for those of us who '*work unpaid from home*' is relentless and we all need a break from it from time to time. Ruth and I are leading/preaching at all the services today because John & Priscilla are on holiday – John because after 9 months in our parishes, it's time we gave him a week off, and Priscilla of course is unfortunately on enforced rest – I'm sure she'd rather be at work!

In our Gospel reading from Mark, Jesus is asking his disciples to come away to a quiet place and rest awhile. He had previously commissioned them to go out to spread the good news, to travel to all the villages in the vicinity proclaiming that all should repent. The disciples cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. Today's reading sees the disciples

returning to tell Jesus all the things they have done and taught, and it is then that Jesus says they should rest – to recoup their strength and give sustenance to their spiritual needs, away from the madding crowd.

According to the story, neither Jesus nor the disciples get that well earned rest, for lots of people saw them trying to slink off for some peace and quiet, and rushed to the other side of the lake to meet them. The people got there ahead of Jesus and the disciples, and rather than heading off to spend time alone, Jesus shows compassion and starts to teach them many things. The next bit of the story that follows on immediately, that we haven't heard, is the 'feeding of the 5000' and then Jesus 'walking on the water' – then we get back to the end of today's reading, seeing Jesus and his disciples coming to dry land again, and again being besieged by people wanting to know more and bringing their sick to be healed. It seems that the work of Jesus and his disciples is never done, and there is little time for real rest.

In Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, he is explaining how Jesus worked tirelessly to bring Gentile and Jew together into one being. How he worked to create one humanity, breaking down the wall that divided the strange and the alien so there could be peace.

It would seem that Jesus never stopped working, never took a holiday, but he did take time out, and we hear of many times in the bible where he goes off on his own. To quiet spaces where he could think and pray. To be in conversation with his Father and to renew his spiritual and physical strength so he could face another day teaching and healing. If Jesus hadn't had these quiet times away,

alone, he would have made himself ill. In today's words - he 'would have burnt himself out' long before he was crucified.

Jesus was aware that his disciples needed to learn to take time out too. Eager as they were to go out and heal the sick, cast out demons, and bring people to repentance, they needed to rest awhile.

It is no different for us in this age, in fact these days it may be even more important. Just as the saying goes, 'all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy' – if we don't learn to make ourselves aware of our need to be still and silent at times, to take stock, to reflect and to pray, then we too will be 'dull' – we will be just too tired to 'shine'. It is those times when we are still that, in the words of St. Paul, 'we can grow into a holy temple in the Lord in whom we are also built together, spiritually into a dwelling-place for God'. How else can we create a home for God in our hearts if we don't take time out to prepare that dwelling-place?

We perhaps know only too well that the busyness of our lives can sometimes leave little time for '5 minutes peace' – which is actually the title of a very apt children's book by Jill Murphy about an elephant called Mrs. Large who is trying to get 5 minutes peace from her children. The children are busy entertaining themselves, so Mrs Large takes herself off to the bathroom for a long, hot, peaceful bath – with a nice hot, relaxing cup of tea. One by one the children appear by the side of the bath asking if she will just listen to this, just watch that, – she doesn't get her 5 minutes peace because she has compassion for her children, just as Jesus had compassion for the people who followed him wanting to hear more. Having compassion for the needs of others is good, but not to the detriment of our own wellbeing.

When we arrange a holiday, sometimes preparing for it can mean so much extra work that it hardly seems worth having a break after all. Also some holidays are so jam-packed full with things to do, people to see, places to go, that we need a holiday to get over the holiday! It is also not always so that 'a change is as good as a rest' – some change to the normal daily routine can be exhausting!

So maybe it is better to take rest 'a little and often', rather than to take infrequent, long, busy holidays. But that 'little and often' rest still needs to be away from it all, where one can be still perhaps even silent.

This church (Kingsbury), thanks to some lovely volunteers, is now open for a couple of hours on a Saturday morning through the summer – do come along and soak up the peace and tranquillity – just for 20 minutes or so – not every week, but when it suits. Maybe even sometimes take in Morning Prayer – it can be surprising just how refreshed and at peace one feels afterwards.....

When all the busyness of the world and life around us gets just a little too much – heed the words of Jesus – 'Come away and rest awhile.

Amen