

“Retreating to a Lonely Place”—Mark 6:31-32

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Retreating to a Lonely Place”, is Mark 6:31-32. Jesus *said to His disciples, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

How well do you deal with being alone in the quiet? For many silence can be very uncomfortable. While you may feel quite comfortable being alone, dealing with the silence in the midst of such times is another matter. Could it be attributed to the fact that you can’t really experience silence even during your quiet times? How does one shut off the mind? How does one silence the thoughts which are constantly processing yet many times seem to be screaming, fighting, struggling and so forth? Thinking about your many responsibilities, worrying, arguing with people in your head, coming-face-to-face with your true self or a host of other thoughts can override the silence around you. In light of such “loud silence” the answer for many people is to distract the brain with background noise (i.e. TV or music), even

when busy with an activity.

Jesus recognized the importance of quiet time alone. Our text records an incident where Jesus commanded His disciples upon their return from their missionary journeys to “get away from it all.” He said: *Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while* (verse 31). Notice it was for the purpose of getting some *rest* in the midst of the heavy demands of all the people around them, *for many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat* (verse 32).

One danger we face in our lives is getting too caught up in the constant busy-ness of life. Each day can place more and more demands and responsibilities upon us, soaking up our emotions and energy to the point of feeling like we’re drowning in the midst of our activities. Before we know it, relationships suffer, the quality of our work is affected and we are wide open for the devil’s temptations in our emotional and mental weakness. Keeping busy can actually become the “god” which motivates, drives and defines our lives. It becomes more natural to stay busy so that we don’t have to face our true selves and struggles in the midst of our spiritual decay. The devil takes the blessing of work and turns it into the burden of sin.

While Scriptures recognize the importance of work they also stress the importance of resting physically and “resting” in the LORD. Yahweh recognized the importance of rest according to Genesis 2:2-3

→ *He rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done.*

*So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all His work that He had done in creation.* This rest was not for God's benefit. As the Almighty God there would be no reason for Him to rest. He put time for rest in place **for us** so that we could be refreshed and re-charged for further service. Both work and rest are God's gifts to us. Ever heard anyone say, "It's sure nice to get away but it's also nice to get back to work"? A balance of work and rest helps you appreciate them as good gifts from God (cf. Ecclesiastes 3:12-13).

This "rest" is so important to Yahweh that He included it in His Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:8-10 → *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work.* Aside from physical recuperation, actually this day of rest in the week was intended to safeguard you from the sin of idolatry. If you don't rest **in relationship with Him** you will start to think that all your work depends totally upon yourself and act like you're the one who is totally in control. Aside from leading to physical exhaustion and mental "burn-out," idolatry will hold you in spiritual "shut down," disabled in service for the LORD. Being God holds a great responsibility **and believe me, you are not up to that task.** You

need the rest that only Jesus can provide.

Verse 32 of our text says the disciples of Jesus *went away in the boat to a desolate place **by themselves***. They went to a desolate, quiet place to be alone with Jesus . . . together? While many people tend to view being alone as something negative because it implies loneliness, here Jesus puts it into a positive perspective. In fact, it is needed in your life.

The major loneliness that people experience in their lives comes from struggles in the midst of spiritual battles, not necessarily from simply being alone. The devil will do all in his power to make you feel distant from God by keeping you distracted in busy-ness in an effort to make you spiritually “stress out.” Thus, it is important to go to a *desolate place* to be reminded Who is Lord—Who is in charge of your life. Psalm 46:10 says: *Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.*

Although we may not think about it this way, we have come with Jesus to this “desolate” place in worship. In the midst of all the busy-ness in your life, in the midst of the muddle and struggles in sin, problems and trials, you have come here together to be reassured that Yahweh is God and that Jesus is Lord. Here is where you find rest for your soul so that you can go back into your busy life and continue to *exalt* God in the presence of the people around you.

Thus, we go to this place not merely to “get away from it all” but, more importantly, to be “alone with Jesus” **together** and be refreshed through God’s Word and sacraments, worship and prayer. Your daily alone time is an excellent opportunity to pick up your Bible and read God’s Word. It is time for discussion with the Lord in prayer. In your Bible you will hear how Jesus *would withdraw to desolate places **and pray*** (cf. Luke 5:16). When you also withdraw from the world and gather together in this place for worship you are forgiven through the means of grace and spiritually re-charged in connection with your Vine, Jesus. He says in John 15:5 → *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.* **Together** we retreat to this place to be “alone” (i.e. separated from the world) to receive Christ’s presence and His forgiveness. **Together** we retreat to this place to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to go back into our busy vocations in life where the Lord Jesus places us to serve others.

The demands of people were very really to Jesus and His disciples. However, these demands were minute in comparison with what was demanded of Him to bring about the true rest for your soul. His service to you demanded that He offer His life in death as the sufficient sacrifice for your sin. He knew the ultimate loneliness of separation from His Father as He bore your sins upon Himself on that

cross. His service to you has brought you eternal rest in the loving arms of your heavenly Father.

Spending time with God by reading His Word, prayer and worship with others around His Word and sacraments, also equips you to meet the challenges that the Christian life brings each and every day. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 reassures us: *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* Equipped and empowered by the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures, we go back into the situations of life to bring the rest of Jesus to others through the Law and Gospel which we share with them. Retreating to be alone with Jesus in His Word and Sacraments in worship, the Holy Spirit empowers you for the spiritual battles you face while sharing His Word and serving your neighbor.

In order to experience the eternal rest which awaits you in heaven you must trust in Jesus alone. Hebrews 4:9-11 says *there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest.* This is why we strive to remain steadfast in our relationship with Jesus through God's written Word and sacraments. Yes, you may feel lonely, many times feeling like you're alone in a desolate place in the world in which you live. However, it also means that you have a sense of belonging as you retreat to the place of this sanctuary to be alone with Jesus together

and be built up in your relationship with the LORD and one another around the forgiveness dispensed in His means of grace. Amen.

Jesus says in Matthew 11:28-29 → *Come to Me,  
all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

*Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me,  
for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

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