

Everyone is Searching

Rev. John Allen

He was just trying to get a moment to himself.

Only a few days into his public ministry and Jesus needs some time away. Whether he realized it or not, he has stepped into a world so steeped in human need, that in every town he enters the people pour out into the streets around him. Yearning for a healing touch and a word of hope.

Heading into the home, of a friend offers no escape.

Simon's mother-in-law is in bed with a fever and they wonder what he might do.

All the while, the story says, the entire town is gathered outside the door. Waiting. Wanting a glimpse of this Holy One of God. Come to set them free.

And Jesus. Heals the sick. Frees people from the spirits that constrain their souls. As many as come before him. He offers what he has. Freely. Without condition. Without hesitation.

One after another, after another, after another.

Not just in this one town. But every town, and along the road, everywhere he goes.

He was the most sought after celebrity of the moment. But people came to him not for a selfie or a signature. But for their very lives.

And so. In the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus slips away.

Out of the backdoor of the house, through the narrow alleys of the small Galilean Town. Out, beyond the city limits, to a deserted place. To the wilderness.

The wilderness. The very place where he had been tempted by his adversary only days before.

Yet a place that now seems inviting in the face of the crush of the crowd.

Out to a deserted place, where he falls to the ground to pray.

What he prayed? The story doesn't say.

But he turned his heart toward God in the quiet stillness of a dawning day. Away from it all. Finally at peace.

Now when his friends wake up and find him missing, they are confused. Because there are more people to heal, more towns to visit, more teaching to do, more disciples to call. Where could he have gone off to when there is so much to do?

So they go looking for him, and when they got to the edge of the town they looked out and saw a small silhouette sitting on the ground and casting a long shadow in the early morning sun.

Rushing up to him they are insistent.

“Everyone is looking for you!”

And Jesus, with a smile and a sigh rises to his feet. Brushes the Galilean dust off his cloak. And says: “Let’s go.”

“Let’s go to the next town, and I will proclaim the message there also; for that is what I have come to do.”

And they got up. And went on their way. And the healing and the hope followed them, wherever they would go.

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Have you ever had a day like that?

Perhaps not with the miraculous healings and the exorcisms.

But have you ever felt like the whole world is waiting right outside your door, and everyone needs something?

Have you ever felt overwhelmed by the needs of your family? Or your friends?

Or the demands of a job?

Have you ever felt consumed?

Consumed by embarrassment or frustration. Overwhelmed?

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Here is what Jesus does, in the face of that.

He steps back. He steps away.

Before it all becomes too much, he wakes up early, before anyone else, and he withdraws in order to pray.

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Just a few days ago I was on the phone with a wonderful woman who has become something of a mentor and a coach to me.

As we were talking earlier this week, she had a suggestion for something that would really, inner opinion, have a powerful impact on my practice of leadership.

Carve out some time. She said, as if it were as simple as that. For a silent retreat.

If you cannot do a full 30 days, you could just try a week.

Sounds nice.

But of course my life isn't like that.

But the point is taken. Stepping away is an important part of the rhythm of life. The problem is that, for most of us, it seems impossible. We couldn't find that much time. Or where would we go? Who would watch the kids? What would our colleagues think?

This week's reading though gives us a different model.

Here is what Jesus does. He notices when he is reaching moment when he needs to step away. He needs a break.

And so he finds time for it that does not unduly interfere with his responsibilities. He wakes up early. Before everyone else. To make some time for prayer.

Now personally, I prefer to do it the other way around. Late at night, after everyone else has gone to bed.

But I think this is important. Jesus doesn't through up his arms in the middle of the healing and teaching and say "That's it!" and storm off.

He finds space for himself without making other people feel like they have been an imposition.

He isn't showy about it. He doesn't make a big deal about it. He just slips away, in a moment when no-one would really notice.

I wonder what moments in your life could be like that. On the train or in the car each morning? Or what about finding a quiet corner at work to spend a few moments in prayer before you head home.

Do you work at a hospital or a school or some institution with a chapel? Could you spend 10 minutes of a lunch break in there?

What about after the kids fall asleep? Or before your partner wakes up?

Find a moment in the rhythm of your life that offers solitude, and space, and use it as a time to connect with God. To refresh and restore your soul.

Now, I think there is something else that sometimes keeps us from taking time like this for ourselves. And that is that we worry it is selfish. That it would be wrong to do something for ourselves when other's need so much.

Which is the final beautiful think about Jesus' mini-retreat in this story.

He is not running away. He is not escaping. He is not shutting-down, or shutting out his responsibilities, and the needs of his community.

He is withdrawing, recharging, so *that* he can return to the work that God has called him to.

He sits in prayer so *that* he can rise when his disciples come, so that when everyone is looking for him again, he can say “Let’s go.

Because this is what I was sent here for.”

Now our missions in life are not as profound as Christ’s. But you were sent into this life for a purpose. To offer love. To bring healing and hope. To extend hospitality and kindness. It’s different for each of us, but we all have a life to which we have been called.

I worry our rhythms of work and rest have really become an unsustainable pull back and forth between exhaustion and escape.

We work ourselves to the brink, and then we collapse and escape into Netflix, or worse, too many drinks, or drugs that numb us from the pain of life and the world.

Our 'down-time' is becoming just that. Time when we shut down.
Crash.

It becomes time to numb ourselves, or seek to escape from the world
of our responsibilities

But that kind of escape will never give us the energy we need to
return to our work and our world with a refreshed spirit.

In good measure, I believe our exhaustion and stress can be traced
not just to overwhelming responsibility, but also the poor quality of
our time for rest.

We need to find a new way.

We need to find space away from the crush of days that is not simply
a numb escape.

Jesus did it. So you can too.

And its not for our own sake alone, but for the sake of the world that waits outside our door. The world that needs something from us. That needs us ready to stand up, and say: "Let's go."

That needs us to be ready to do, what it is we have been sent here to do.