

PROPER 11, July 22, 2018, Year B

- The apostles have just returned from their mission, into which Jesus had earlier sent them. *Naturally, they wanted to tell him everything they had done. Especially since Jesus had sent them out with his own power and authority. Surely, they had much to say. He responds to them by saying, "Come away to a deserted place... and rest a while."*
- The wise Gospel teacher, [John Shea](#), suggests that we should *not misunderstand Jesus' invitation to them*. It's *not* that Jesus was offering them *what we would call R&R, or rest and relaxation*. Shea helps us see how Jesus was leading them to *something more profound*. [Jesus was inviting the apostles to go deeper with him, into the mystery of his mission](#).¹ As we have often found, in the biblically sensitive work of the artist [James Tissot](#), the image I share with you today portrays a key moment in today's Gospel story. *Despite Tissot's sensitivity, notice his title for the painting ~ "Jesus commands the Apostles..."* And yet, *in our Gospel reading we clearly hear an invitation, rather than a command*. *Either way, Jesus was urging them to come away ~ a message we can take to heart, as well.*
- Shea points out two key biblical words in our Gospel reading, and *they should catch our attention*. Consider first the role of [deserted places](#) in biblical history. It was [in the desert](#) that Israel was brought into covenant with God, when they received the Law at Mt. Sinai. It was in the desert that both Israel and –*much later*– Jesus, were tested. Whereas Israel *failed* the test, Jesus *prevailed*. And it became the doorway to his public ministry, which made manifest God's Kingdom in a new and personal way. As Jesus himself experienced, [the desert was the place where angels ministered to God's chosen people](#).
- The *second* key word that Shea points toward is '[rest](#),' also a highly symbolic word. By inviting them to rest, Jesus was not really interrupting what he had earlier sent them to do. Instead, he was giving them *an opportunity to fulfill*

their new vocation, and *bring it to completion*. Genesis tells us that on the seventh day, *God rested*. And it was not because God was *tired*, or somehow in need of *restoration*, after six days of creating everything. The seventh day represented the sabbath *Shalom*, the peace that fulfilled of *all* of God's creative purposes. And so, by inviting the apostles into a time of rest, Jesus was inviting them to experience the deeper *fulness* of God's mission, and its presence *within him*. This would best happen *apart from* the pressures and distractions of ongoing ministry.

- These two biblical words, *desert* and *rest*, and the larger concepts they represent, are *important* for us in several ways. Our tendency to hear our Gospel as one where Jesus invites the disciples to have a holiday, seems to make sense. Most of us have busy lives – at least, our days are busier than we want them to be. What we *long for*, and what summer often *provides*, is a time to get away, to be *apart*, and enjoy quiet circumstances that are outdoor-related, and allow for relaxation. And so, we often seek out places that are *rural*, by lakes and streams, or in the woods, *where we aren't surrounded by people*, and where we can *rest*. As many of you have probably noticed in our mural, Grace Church's former longtime rector, Don Carey, is portrayed in his fly-fishing gear, enjoying a stream up north.
- You can bet that *most clergy are no different from anyone else*, in sharing this desire to get away, and have *quiet time*. But the consequence of this is that *most of us –me included–* associate *getting away from it all*, with *having a weekend off from church!* But my point in observing this has nothing to do with things like *rules* or *standards* that we must follow. Instead, I want to highlight that *which has the greatest potential to restore and fulfill us*. A time *apart* from the schedules, tasks and duties of daily life, can also be a time when we re-connect with the spiritual well-spring of our lives. Morning and Evening Prayer; personal devotions; participation in the Eucharist ~ these

are all *ways that we engage in re-connecting with what truly feeds us*, rather than what *depletes* us.

- Here I want to commend a new teaching series by the former National Geographic photographer, [Dewitt Jones](#). It's called, *The Habit of Celebration*. *The Habit of Celebration* beautifully complements *our continuing emphasis on Appreciative Inquiry*, and with the deeper reason *why we are here today*. Because it is so good, and I think helpful for us, I am commending it to our staff and to our Vestry. And I commend it to you, as well. What Dewitt Jones *helps us to see*, fits with *what Jesus invited the apostles to discover*. Like Jesus, *Jones' main concern is to help us turn a point of view, into a practice ~ and then, into a new way of life*. As a parish, this has been our leadership goal ~ to help us *take a gradually embraced point of view, and turn it into a shared pattern of spiritual practice*.
- For we are here to celebrate the Eucharist, to participate in what the Prayer Book calls "the Great Thanksgiving." *To celebrate the Eucharist is a community spiritual practice*, and it is how we live as the Church. *Acts* that are repeated become *habits*. And *habits* are the building blocks of *character, both for individuals and for communities*. *In our Eucharists together, we practice the habit of celebration*. This "sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving" is our way of Life.² We gather here, week by week, to celebrate what has been right and good in our lives, and to offer God –*for transformation*– all that has *not been*. Eucharist is how we come to *a place apart*, to find *rest and fulfillment*, both *real and enduring*.
- But, *as individuals, we may have yet to acquire a personal spiritual practice by which we approach each day with the habit of celebration*. Here is one reason why we may have not. We might look at each new day, and say to ourselves and to God, "well, I *would* practice the habit of celebration *if only* I had something to celebrate!" This would be like thinking to ourselves, "well,

I *would practice* appreciative inquiry *if I only had* some things to appreciate."

- If either of the suspicions I have just named rings true for you, consider the paradox within our Gospel this morning. Jesus invites the apostles to discover the *fullness of life* by going out *into the desert!* He invited them to savor the *supernatural fullness* of the Kingdom by going out into a place where they would experience the greatest *natural emptiness!* The habit of celebration *does not follow from already having* a full awareness of so many things to celebrate. Instead, *practicing celebration helps us discover what there is to celebrate.* As we have said before, for God's people, *believing leads to seeing,* and doesn't just *follow* it! *Celebrating* leads to a greater awareness of *what there is to celebrate.* Just as *practicing* Appreciative Inquiry leads to *noticing what there is to appreciate.*
- When Jesus invited the apostles to come away to the desert, and live into the Shalom of sabbath rest, he was inviting them to live into the realized-fullness of the Kingdom. *This should be our goal, as well.* Cantic 12 in the BCP expresses well *this practice of sabbath rest celebration.* In it, *all* the works of the Lord, *all the things the Lord has made,* *praise him with a common voice!* {invite the congregation to turn with me to BCP:89, Section II}

Let the earth glorify the Lord, *
praise him and highly exalt him for ever.

Glorify the Lord, O mountains and hills, and all that grows upon the earth, *

praise him and highly exalt him for ever.

Glorify the Lord, O springs of water, seas, and streams, * O whales and all that move in the waters.

All birds of the air, glorify the Lord, * praise him and highly exalt him for ever.

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Glorify the Lord, O beasts of the wild, * and all you flocks and herds.

O men and women everywhere, glorify the Lord, * praise him and highly exalt him for ever.³



James Tissot, *Jesus Commands the Apostles to Rest*

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves 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 deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Notes:

¹ See John Shea’s comments in book, *The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers and Teachers*, Year B: *Eating With the Bridegroom* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), p. 183ff.

² The quoted words come from Eucharistic Prayer A, BCP:363.

³ Section II of Canticle 12, A Song of Creation, BCP:88-90.