

Come Away to a Deserted Place and Rest a While

It's good to be back, after being completely "off the grid" for a week! What did I miss?



"Come away to a deserted place and rest a while." Welcome words, right? Did you notice that Jesus' disciples are now "apostles?" [6:30] *Apostoloi*. A Greek word meaning "sent ones." Earlier in the chapter, Jesus had "sent" them out, two by two, to teach and to heal as his ambassadors. They had just returned. And they were bursting at the seams with stories of all they had done and taught.

But they are also tired. Jesus could see it in their faces. [6:31] "Come away," he says to them. It was an invitation. *Deute umeis*.

We've heard that same invitation ourselves, this morning. "Come Away from Rush and Hurry," our opening hymn sang to us. "Come, let us go to the Mountain of God," our second hymn echoed. "Gentle Shepherd, come and lead us, for we need you to help us find our way," we confessed honestly in our third hymn. It's good to be able to recognize and then honestly admit what we need. In fact, it's not just good. It's vital.

How are you all doing at this midway point in the summer? What did I miss while I was gone? Are you invigorated, bursting at the seams with stories? Are you tired, weary?

Deute umeis, "come away," Jesus invites his newly appointed apostles after their first venture on their own. Notice he doesn't say "go away." Not this time. "Come away." With the subtle implication that he would be joining them. You see, Jesus knows that sometimes you just have to get away. He had already done so himself, very early in Mark's gospel [1:35]. Have you had a chance yet this summer to get away? Where did you go?

"Come away to a deserted place and rest a while." A deserted place where we can be alone. By ourselves. Off the grid. In the Greek, it's actually a "desert" place [6:31a, *KJV*]. *Erymon topon*.

We usually think of a desert place as a dry place. Like Arizona, or Nevada. A place you don't particularly want to go to in the middle of summer. (Unless you're Doug Miller and Holly Swartzendruber. But they have family there. And anyway, now they're in the much cooler mountains of Montana.)

Lois and I were with her family in a lush forest just outside of Comins, Michigan. Itself a kind of "desert place," with a population of somewhere around 500. In the middle of this lush forest there is a lake. "Rhoads Lake," it's called. Named after the family of Lois' grandmother, Florence Mitchell né Rhoads. We were there with about twenty Rhoads cousins. Celebrating Lois' mom's 80th birthday, in the very community where she was born. A lush place, right on the shore of a spring-fed, shocking cold, Michigan lake. (The mosquitos there are big, by the way!)

Sometimes it seems as if our own Marion County is off the grid, right? The internet can be pretty spotty at times. (Maybe it will feel different once we get our fiber-optic cable up and running!) But if it's where we live and work, then we still need to get away from it sometimes. Where are you going to get away to? The Colorado mountains, maybe?

Interestingly, in Mark's gospel this "desert place" or "deserted place" or "wilderness" was also where Jesus was tempted by the devil. [1:12, *NIB*] (We find that story in Mark 1:12.)

Tempted by the devil to never return home. Tempted to run away. From his God-given mission. From his true path. (By the way, you may be glad to know that during our trip this past week, Lois and I were never tempted to run away. Like I said, it's good to be back! ☺) No, that same "desert place" is where Jesus returned to later in the gospel in order to be reminded of his true path [1:35]. We all need to be reminded of our true paths, from time to time, don't we?

"Come away to a deserted place and rest a while." [6:31] Sometimes, we simply need to rest. *Anapauesthe*. The Greek verb can mean "to rest from our labors," or even "to take life easy." Which—let's be honest—we would all need explicit permission to do, or we'll never do it. What have been your labors recently? I know that the farmers among us have been laboring to get the wheat harvest finished, and the beans planted. How's that going? (The weather hasn't exactly cooperated, has it? We drove by some pretty flooded fields on our trip home this last Thursday.)

And what about the rest of you? What have your labors consisted of recently? For those of you who are teachers, it sometimes takes the first half of the summer to recover from the school year, right? Are you starting to feel rested up, at least a little? Are you finally finding some time to "take life easy?" Good for you! Enjoy it! Relish in it!

"Come away to a desert place and rest a while." [6:31, KJV] In fact, let's indulge ourselves a little, shall we? Let's have a little fun! Let's add another "s" to that word "desert." What does that give us? Dessert! "Come away to a dessert place and rest a while!"

In planning for our trip to northern Michigan, Lois took it upon herself to arrange the meals for our extended family time together. For breakfasts, she found a local bakery that makes cinnamon rolls. She ordered one per person. They told her that their cinnamon rolls are really big; are you sure you want to order twenty of them? She said she was. Let's just say that by the end of the week, we still hadn't eaten through all of those cinnamon rolls. And by the way, for one of our breakfasts, she also ordered some delicious doughnuts from that same bakery. Some of them were cream filled. It really was a "dessert place!" What summer desserts have you been indulging in recently? Homemade ice cream, anyone?

"Come away to a desert place and rest a while," Jesus invited his disciples/apostles/sent ones. You deserve it. You've done good work. Hard work. In the next verse, Mark reports that "they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves" [6:32]. Ahhh! That must have felt good! Mark doesn't say, so we can only assume that they did indeed "rest a while." For how long, we don't know. Might have been just a day or two. Might even have been a whole week. But already in the next verse [6:33], Mark says that the crowds had seen them go, and hurried there on foot, and when Jesus saw them he was moved with compassion [6:34], because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he knew that he was their shepherd.

Jesus could not run away from his true path. And you know what? Neither can we. Sooner or later, the time comes for us to return to the mission on which Jesus has sent us, his apostles. I'm sure you noticed that the lectionary editors skipped over verses 35-52, and resume this morning's lection at verse 53 [6:53-55], where we read that people were "rushing" about that whole region, bringing the sick to Jesus wherever they heard he was. [6:56] "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." Sounds like he and his disciples were right back into the thick of things!

But let us not skip too quickly past verse 31 [6:31], where Jesus invites his tired apostles to "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." *Anapauesthe*. Rest from

your labors. Take it easy. Welcome words for weary bodies, hearts, souls, and minds! One of the many ways the Lord our Father and “Shepherd” cares for us!

Amen.