

Mark 6.30-34, 53-56; Jer. 23.1-6; Psalm 23; Eph. 2.11-22. Trinity 7: 18th July 2021 - 10:30 a.m. Zoom
from St. Andrew's Vicarage, Totteridge

“Battery Recharge”

Enable us, our Father, to respond to the grace of your word with humility of heart and in the spirit of love; that our lives may be conformed more and more to the image of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

I'm sure all of you, at one point or another, will have experienced that sickening feeling of realising that the *essential* piece of equipment you *so* rely on, has run out of power. Or, that the charge lead you needed to top it up with, was left at home. We've all been there, haven't we.

Many of you will have seen the announcement in the eNews last week that I was recently advised by my doctor to take some time off – I am officially still on sick leave as we speak, and will be next week too – but I couldn't miss the opportunity to be with you today, at least over the computer, and in particular, because today's Gospel reading is so appropriate for times like this.

I know it to be true that wanting to be a follower of Jesus, - a 'Christian disciple' in other words, - and whether a minister of the church or not, we can be left vulnerable to high levels of guilt and exhaustion. It is to do with our expectations. Are we doing enough for God? The task is endless. The challenges are huge. And what is ever enough for God?

So, for some of us at least, the story of Jesus trying to arrange a retreat, a quiet time, a few days off for his disciples because they are tired or in need of healing themselves, may come as a merciful reversal of our assumptions about what God expects of us.

I share David Runcorn's experience that, no matter how far ahead our quiet day or retreat is planned in the diary, it is rarely convenient when it arrives. There are always compelling reasons for feeling we just can't take the time out. And even for Jesus in the gospel, 'the crowds' are pressing even as the disciples arrive.

But do you need to hear Jesus say to you – 'come away for a while by yourself'? Notice that the invitation is not to be with him in the first instance; it is to be with *ourselves*. What are you like giving yourself silence, space & solitude? We cannot proclaim God unless we spend some time alone, and then we'll be better for his company.

It certainly needs planning, but without times like this, we can end up living at some distance from ourselves. As British psychotherapist and essayist Adam Phillips put it: 'our lives take the form of an absence'. Jesus knows we need the spaces where we stop, we rest, and we catch up with ourselves.

This is what Psalm 23 is about too, the idea of the ‘divine shepherd’ – a symbolic metaphor for a God who provides everything we need, who wants to see to it that we do take sufficient rest, who points us in the right directions, and even through the darkest of times.

In that way, Jesus is the master builder, who underlines how important it is for each of us to take care of ourselves and each other, to provide our lives with firm foundations, that can be built on, relied on, and that won’t fail because we haven’t taken enough care. We’re no good to anyone if we run out of steam!

Whenever Jesus was busy or had important decisions to make, he always spent some time in quietness and prayer. Jesus understood well that there is no human who could forever ‘pour themselves out’ without some new ‘in-pouring’. Just like a battery or a powerpack, unless we are re-charged every now and again, we will run out of power and energy. All humans need a time of rest and refreshment. How do you make sure you get yours?

After the disciples had been busy sharing in the outreach of Jesus, he said to them, ‘come away to a deserted place and rest a while.’ The rest they got was possibly only a few hours, up to 5 maybe as they crossed the Sea of Galilee because, as soon as they landed, the crowds, many of whom had walked the ten miles around the inland sea, began to gather. At least they had some time to rest, to be quiet, and to be with Jesus.

It would’ve been easy to get frustrated with the demands of the people, but Jesus was sorry for them. They were like sheep without a shepherd. They needed a guide and someone to care for them. They needed someone to love them and look after them. Real life sheep don’t last very long out on the hills without someone to feed them and to care for them – they get lost and lose their way.

So, whether it’s about taking care of ourselves, looking after others, helping people back onto the best course, Jesus is the best battery charger for our spirits and the most loving shepherd who always prays to bring us home.