

Today's gospel takes us back to the mission of the apostles as they are authorised by Jesus to go and heal and cast out evil spirits. The disciples return and tell Jesus of the successes of their mission. Jesus though, recognises something in the lives of the apostles that they may not see themselves and something that we, ourselves, often fail to see. The need to rest.

The narrative that we hear from Mark does need some context to fully see that need. A lot has happened already for the apostles. Their preaching, their healing, and their casting out of evil spirits would not be without cost. Ministry, sometimes, is exhausting and the need to stop and rest is important for any ministry to be fruitful. The rest that Jesus talks of when he says "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" is not the sitting down watching TV type of rest. It is resting with God. Jesus doesn't say go home and have a lie down, he says come and rest with me.

I wonder what the busyness of people's lives around the diocese is like. People responsible for parishes have many things to think about. They have to think about buildings, they have to think about fundraising, they have to consider the needs of others, that is, their pastoral needs, they have to organise prayers, services, and a whole range of other things. Busyness distracts us from the role we have as people on mission. And while all those items are important, the most important part of our role as God's people, through Christ, here and now, is to **be** God's people, in relationship with him. Only in relationship with God, through Christ, can our role be fully exercised. So, Jesus gives an instruction to rest, and rest with him. And why, because he knows that the mission of God will draw people in, and times of rest will become valued. In a way Jesus is instructing the disciples, as well as us, that the work of mission, that is to bring people to God, is important, as is spending time with God ourselves.

Jesus knows what would happen as the good news of the gospel spread. More and more people would come to know the grace of God through Jesus. As the narrative in the gospel continues, we see that. We see it in the part that is left out of the reading, that is the feeding of the 5000, and the disciples crossing the lake in another storm while Jesus prays by himself, and we see it when the narrative continues as people run from the surrounding villages and towns to see, hear, and touch Jesus for their healing. The urgency and pace of Mark's words draw us to further recognise the need to rest in the busyness.

You might ask the question then what does this resting do? It doesn't just relieve our ministry exhaustion!

Rest is a time of refreshment. The church cannot fulfil its mission when it is not fresh, so, refreshment is vital for the gospel. The same message, delivered in the same way because of busyness, cannot hope to bring people into the presence of God. Resting in God allows us to offload the old and take on the new so that people hear in many ways the wonders and glory of God. Refreshment is vital to the church and her mission to spread the good news of Jesus.

Rest is a time of relationship. In rest we can sit with God, sometimes in silence, sometimes with our words, sometimes with the words of another through music. When we sit with God we join in fellowship with God, like sitting with a friend. We don't have to speak, we are free to speak if we want to, or we can join to each other through the sounds we hear around us. In that we are joined in relationship, one to another as friends. And we can sit with God because of the cross. We have no need to fear our sin, no need to fear that we are separate from God because through the cross that which can separate us is destroyed and we are joined to God. Through Jesus there is nothing that can separate us from God, to draw from Romans 8. We can rest in relationship, without fear.

Rest is a time of refocus. We set aside the things that weigh us down and focus on Jesus. Jesus reminds us that through him we find rest and the burden is lifted.

We can't stay in rest though! Jesus knew when to rest. There were times of quiet, there were times of prayer, there were times spent with the apostles to sit, teach, listen, and even dine with them, but the mission that Jesus was on, involved reaching out. Not reaching out to his friends but reaching out to those who needed to hear the news of salvation, those who need to see God through healing, through feeding, and through guiding. Jesus reached to the lost because they needed a shepherd.

All of this begs some questions of us, hard questions. Is this church at rest or has it rested enough? Sometimes a church might look as if it needs to rest but has, in fact been refreshed, built its relationship with God, and been recharged for the next part of the journey. A church that has done those things need to go back to those who need it most. Not wait for lost to come in. The lost are lost because they don't know where to go. The refreshed and recharged church that has the good news of Christ to share, through its relationship with Christ is a church that is primed to share the good news. It has rested, and needs to move to evangelism, sharing Jesus.

Or is this church in need of rest, where we are so exhausted with programs, fetes, and fundraisers that it needs to regroup and refocus. Sometimes it is time to stop, to sit, to breath, and to listen for God. Jesus recognised that. The apostles were empowered for mission, they returned, probably excited with their tales, but Jesus recognised their need to stop and rejoin with God. Churches need to do that too.

The challenge for us today is this: have we rested so long that we need to take our refreshment and relationship out to others, or have we spent so long fundraising that we need to return to God. I leave that to your reflections. Amen