

This short act of worship has been prepared for you by Revd Dan Haylett. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

### Prayer

God of all, in wonder and awe we turn to you. We worship and adore you with our hearts, our souls and our minds. As we begin this time of worship, open our hearts to you, challenge us and transform us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### Hymn: StF 248 I heard the voice of Jesus say

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mXMQqiLW9c>

I heard the voice of Jesus say:  
'Come unto me and rest;  
lay down, O weary one, lay down  
your head upon my breast.'  
I came to Jesus as I was,  
weary and worn and sad,  
I found in him a resting-place,  
and he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say:  
'Behold, I freely give  
the living water; thirsty one,  
stoop down and drink and live.'  
I came to Jesus, and I drank  
of that life-giving stream;  
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,  
and now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say:  
'I am this dark world's Light;  
look unto me, your morn shall rise,  
and all your day be bright.'  
I looked to Jesus, and I found  
in him my star, my sun;  
and in that light of life I'll walk,  
till travelling days are done.

*Horatius N. Bonar (1808-1889)*

Let us pray together: All our lives are spent in your presence,  
Holy God!

There is no place we can go to escape the reach of your love,  
and nothing that can deny your grace at work within us.  
We celebrate you with us, alongside us, and for us.

In our work you inspire and encourage us, energising us for service. In our rest, you are with us, breathing peace and restoring us.

We turn to you, as the source of all that we are. We worship you, the giver of life and love beyond measure. We praise and adore you, our generous God.

We seek forgiveness for the wrong we have done and for the evil we are caught up in, compromised with. We rely on your grace.

In Christ, your freedom is held out to us, and we choose today to bring you, our thanks. Our lives find shape, rhythm and purpose in you. In Christ, we are being made whole and drawn deeper into the wonder and mystery of God. We offer our lives in response.

Holy Spirit of God, truth-giving, hope instilling, renew us as we worship. Receive our prayers and praise, and shape our lives in response to all that you are. In the name of Christ. Amen.

**Today's Gospel Reading:** Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

<sup>30</sup>The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup>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. <sup>32</sup>And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. <sup>33</sup>Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. <sup>34</sup>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.

<sup>53</sup>When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. <sup>54</sup>When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, <sup>55</sup>and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. <sup>56</sup>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."

### Time to Reflect

"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.'" (Mark 6:30-31).

There is, it seems to me, an ebb and flow at the heart of a life of faith. There is the movement and rhythm of times of active

serving – times when we are stretched to the limit by what we have to do, at home, at work, or as we care for others. Then there is the corresponding counter balance of finding ourselves more consciously in God’s presence, where we respond to that call of Jesus to his disciples, to “come away”.

We see that pattern and rhythm echoed many times over through the gospels. Remember Mary and Martha? Remember the times Jesus draws aside from those around him? The sheer excitement and pace of Mark’s presentation of Jesus’ ministry of immediate immanence is punctuated by those moments of sabbath rest and retreat.

William Barclay, commenting on our Gospel reading from Mark, makes this claim. *“The rhythm of the Christian life is the alternate meeting with God in the secret place and serving people in the market place”*.

That rhythm comes out of the enriching renewal of God’s presence with a corresponding movement outwards to serve, to discover, to embody what we are invited to more fully become in Christ.

This is not an original thought of course, but a truth that has at various times in Christian tradition been known and celebrated and at times forgotten and rediscovered.

It was known in the sixth-century AD. The monk Dorotheos of Gaza offered this teaching: *“Suppose we were to take a compass and insert the point and draw the outline of the circle. Let us suppose that this circle is the world and that God is the centre. As human beings draw closer to God, moving from the outer edge of the circle to the centre, they also draw closer to one another. The closer they are to God, the closer they become to one another; and the closer they are to one another, the closer they become to God”*.

Inner spiritual growth and renewal is intimately bound up with our relationships with others in this rhythm of retreat, encounter and return.

Skip forward several centuries and you find the same pattern coming to the fore again in John Wesley’s insistence on the importance of using the “means of grace” (such as prayer, sharing in worship, and partaking in Holy Communion) to grow in holiness. But this was never simply thought of as being solely an individual, privatised moment. The purpose of this growth in holiness was for salvation and sanctification: all of creation restored and perfected in love. It meant that action was required!

That rhythm of retreat, encounter and return at the heart of our life of faith needs to be maintained in order to move us on and transform us and the world around us.

The readings we heard from Mark's gospel seem to be two stories stitched together that book-end the account of Jesus walking on the water. The apostles (it's the only time in the Gospel of Mark that word is used, by the way) have been sent out by Jesus as representatives to share in and to widen his ministry. Meanwhile we are told about the death of John the Baptist, and then the apostles return to give their report on their mission.

It's after their encounters that Jesus invites the apostles to come away to a deserted place for rest. However, the planned retreat goes wrong! They are recognised and chased down and instead of rest, Jesus has to host an impromptu picnic for over 5,000 people. Still apparently desperate to secure some downtime for his apostles, Jesus sends them ahead only for that plan to be interrupted to describe the account of Jesus' walking on the water. Finally, arriving on shore (in a different place than was expected), people recognise Jesus and we are told the whole region turns out to be a part of proceedings.

Now if this passage is supposed to be a case study on how to achieve the perfect balance in the Christian life; how to manage your time and how to achieve what we sometimes call the work/life balance (as if work is separate from our life) then Jesus hardly sets us a good example here! It seems a world away from the spiritual teachings of those who advocate the

need for a calm prayerful centred approach before any action can take place.

seems to happen instead is that Jesus and the disciples are swamped by the needs of those around them. There was no time for them even to eat as they returned from their work and found the crowds there, and no respite by the end, villages, cities, and farms alike all want a piece of the action. I don't know about you but I feel exhausted just listening to this!

Yet of course actually we know that Jesus is not after all simply offering good advice on time management or balancing commitments. Neither is he offering a simple model of self-care here. What Mark records instead is the reality of life for anyone who seeks to follow in the way of Christ. Far from suggesting Christian commitment makes it possible to sail through life simply giving out to everybody and anybody; Mark shows us the determination of Jesus to find a place to breathe, for disciples to come away to. We are given this snapshot as an unusual and extreme example of what can happen to us as we seek to support and offer loving care to those around us. It can tire us out, it can demand our all, it can knock our inner rhythms out of kilter. It can leave us imagining the whole world is on our shoulders.

What I notice in Mark's relating of this is that Jesus doesn't make his disciples feel bad about how they find themselves.

He doesn't chastise them for not finding time to pray, or for being so overwhelmed by the need around them that they are on permanent giving out mode. In fact the only emotion that is mentioned in the passage is Jesus' compassion: for the crowds in their need.

What I notice about Mark's stories of the rhythm of Christian life and service is that, as we sometimes say, "stuff happens!" Jesus makes plans to invite the disciples to come away for prayer and rest – and they get blown off course, literally, as they get into boats to escape the crowds. The disciples suddenly have to host 5,000 extra guests for lunch and fear they don't have enough to make ends meet. There is no rest to be found anywhere!

What I think this says to us is that a planned, disciplined approach to our prayer life, our reading scriptures, and our worship and service is a good plan. But "stuff happens" and God's presence does not leave us, desert us in the times we are blown off course. Out of the lack of a lunch, loaves and fishes fed the thousands. Out of a time of exhaustion and a need for rest, a whole region sought and found healing.

There is a balance that needs to be found within us, allowing God to speak, to minister, to work within us and then there is a time to act, to stand up, to follow, and to serve. But that balance needs to happen in a real way throughout our whole

lives. We need to find and show that compassion of Christ for those who are at different stages in their own lives at this time, and for ourselves if we find we are not able to do the things we once did.

At the heart of this unusual story, or two stories woven together comes the invitation of Jesus, "come away for a while, and rest". This is what we need to hear today. An invitation for you to find rest, to find the strength needed for service. An invitation that cannot and need not be put off forever, or for long.

#### **A prayer:**

Dear Lord, support us all the day long, till the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then, in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging and a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen.

#### **A time of prayer**

I invite you to think about each specific focus in turn and end with "The Lord hears our prayer". "Thanks be to God".

We pray for our world, for nations living in turmoil and confusion. We pray for leaders everywhere at international, national and

local level. "The Lord hears our prayer". "Thanks be to God".

We pray for our society where the diseased attitudes of racism persist and seeks to deny the truth about you and your image within us. "The Lord hears our prayer". "Thanks be to God".

We pray for all who are unwell, alone, or awaiting treatment. We pray for all who rely on the support and generosity of others. "The Lord hears our prayer". "Thanks be to God".

We pray for God's Church in every place, and particularly as people consider how to find and maintain the rhythm of their discipleship. Bring peace and rest to those who are tired and refresh the energy of those seeking to respond to you. "The Lord hears our prayer". "Thanks be to God".

We pray also for ourselves, and I invite you to spend some time in prayer to God for yourself.

*"The Lord hears our prayer". "Thanks be to God".*

***The Lord's Prayer Our Father .....***

***Hymn: The Lord is my Shepherd (StF 481)***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN4tPkXOMG0>

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;  
he makes me lie in pastures green,  
he leads me by the still, still waters,  
his goodness restores my soul.

And I will trust in you alone, and I will trust in you alone, for  
your endless mercy follows me, your goodness will lead me  
home.

He guides my ways in righteousness,  
and he anoints my head with oil;  
and my cup -- it overflows with joy,  
I feast on his pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path --  
I will not fear the evil one,  
for you are with me, and your rod and staff  
are the comfort I need to know.

*Stuart Townend (b. 1963)*

**A prayer of blessing**

God of faithfulness, always journeying with us, as we journey through this week and all that lies ahead, help us to remember you are always with us.

Grant us faithfulness to you and to Jesus, our Lord and Saviour.

Grant us strength to witness and proclaim your kingdom of love and grace.

And the blessing of God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be among you and those whom you cherish in your heart, now and always. Amen.

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