

Retreat at home

"Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." ~ Mark 6:31



How has the experience of lockdown been for you? Have you stopped to reflect on your response? Perhaps you are craving company with others or maybe you have been so busy trying to navigate the new landscape that you are feeling a little crumpled and in need of some time to stop and be on your own?

These words of Jesus to his disciples - Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest – are meant for us too.

I have been working from home for nearly six months! I have gone from a very busy, people facing job, working with toddlers and babies to having to interact over a computer screen with a lot less interaction and no baby cuddles! I have had to navigate the intricacies of balancing home and work life, trying to sensitively share our space. Home becomes office for the two of us. The busyness has been of a different ilk; being creative in connecting with others. Checking in on the families I support and being there to signpost and support from afar.

During this strange and challenging time what has revived me has been the moments on my own. Going off for a walk to the woods and sitting on a bench. Using my prayer nook in the study and lighting a candle. Going to the bottom of the garden. Making time for stillness and silence.

As I write this I am soon be heading off on a day retreat to be led by the Archdeacon of Norwich for the soon to be licensed readers. A chance to come away by myself to a quiet place. Perhaps you can't give a whole day up for this luxury of precious time. Life is perhaps too busy. Too hard. Too hectic. However, I believe, whatever is going on for us we can *all* find five minutes. This would be my challenge to you: Find five precious minutes – once your toddler has dropped off for his/her nap, perhaps cultivate a space just before the family get up or going to bed just slightly earlier. Make yourself a brew and sit with it. Start with just five minutes and let it grow. Be intentional about this time.

Jesus was intentional about this time. As he got busier and busier his time away in deserted places to pray, grew. It seems that Jesus regarded these times alone with his heavenly father as essential to his mission on Earth.

Taking time aside is a spiritual practice and it is known as retreat. A retreat is like a full stop in the narrative of life. You can go away and book into retreat centres for days, even weeks at a time, you can carve out whole days but my encouragement to you would be to start small and keep it simple. Have manageable chunks and retreat where you find yourself – whether in the office or at home. Retreat is Gods invitation to us to spend time with him, rather than as a chore we feel we ought to commit to. How good to set aside some time to soak in God's love and talk to him about the things that not only concern us but also concern God. These words of Jesus are for you *"Come with me by yourself [insert your name here] to a quiet place and get some rest."*

For reflection and prayer

- What value do you place on your spiritual health and relationship with God?
- Read Mark 1 and notice the rhythm of activity and stillness in Jesus' life. How do you respond to this?
- How do you best listen to God? When did you last intentionally set time aside to listen to God?
- The Quiet Garden movement has produced a very helpful guide to silence and stillness with some simple exercises you might find useful. Access it here: <https://quietgarden.org/2020/silence-and-stillness/>

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