

Proper 25 C

October 27, 2019

The Rev. Emily Richards

*Finding Balance*

*Now during those days Jesus went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God.*

In the midst of the many demands of his ministry we hear that Jesus withdraws from the world. He goes off by himself to be in silence and solitude so that he can reconnect with the source of his power, wisdom and love. More than any other Gospel writer Luke mentions these often, overlooked moments of retreat. They are peppered throughout his account giving us a brief glimpse into Jesus' quiet practice of prayer. This particular occasion falls between a heated debate in the synagogue with the Pharisees and the calling of the twelve. When he comes off the mountain, he gets right back into the thick of ministry. Healing, teaching, inviting others to follow him. Re-engaged and re-energized in the work his Father has given him to do. "The priority of Jesus' solitude and silence is everywhere in the Gospels," comments Spiritual Director Bill Gaultiere in his blog, [Soul Shepherding](#). "It's how he began his ministry and how he made important decisions. It's how he dealt with difficult emotions like grief. It's how he dealt with the constant demands of his ministry and cared for his soul. It's how he taught his disciples and prepared for his death on the cross. Jesus' solitude is how he went deeper in his relationship with the God he knew as his loving parent." If it wasn't for his ability to step away from all the demands of his world, I'm not sure Jesus could have been so fully present to the needs of those around him, embracing his chosen identity and purpose with such clarity.

I was drawn to this image because it is a helpful reminder to us of our need to step back, step out and unplug from our daily lives and obligations including the many things and people that demand our time and attention. To be in silence and in solitude for an evening or an hour or even three months in order to get closer to the very heartbeat of God. My sabbatical was a time of both rest and play, delighting in God's natural world. It was a time to reconnect with people and places and to appreciate again why they were a part of my journey and how they helped shaped my faith. One of the most important aspects

of being able to step out of my role as your priest was to rekindle my calling to the priesthood and to engage in some intentional reflection on what that means for me right now among you.

At Sewanee, I spent time with the Revd. Julia Gatta, a seminary professor. I read her book, *The Nearness of God: Parish Ministry as Spiritual Practice*. In its opening pages, she quotes theologian Karl Rahner who believed that, "the life of the priest is to dwell in the explicit nearness of God." And then the Revd. Gatta goes on to comment that what she finds wonderful about being a priest is the sense of God's nearness with people as their pastor and in presiding over the experiences of word and sacrament. Seventeen years ago I vowed to my Bishop and to the Church that I would become one who celebrates with God's people in every age and stage of life; one who preaches and teaches on God's word; one who declares God's forgiveness, pronounces God's blessing, prays for God's people, presides over the celebrations of Baptism and Eucharist; and one who nourishes and strengthens God's people for their service in the world (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 531).

I have come to realize that ordained ministry these days can also include being one who maintains the Website and posts throughout the day on multiple Social Media platforms, one who manages personnel and property, one who functions as CEO, CFO and COO all at once, one who is expected to be a Visionary Leader, Community Organizer, Head Cheerleader and so on. However, when these roles supersede my ordination vows or even when I try to do them all alongside of my vows, I can forget my identity and why you called me to be your priest. I am grateful for the gift of the time over the summer to step away and rest in the solitude of God's love, reclaiming the beauty and truth of my priesthood - that I have been given the amazing privilege of dwelling in the nearness of God with you.

As I continue to re-enter into church life, I am recommitting myself to the spiritual practice of ministry primarily through worship, pastoral care, prayer, and study. This means that I have to do less of the other things. To trust that what needs to be done will get done and what's left undone needs to be left undone. To be a good steward of my own time and talent, while entrusting you to also become good stewards, sharing your gifts for the sake of the well-being of this community and of all God's beloved.

To follow Jesus is to pattern our lives on his life which involved an incredible sense of balance. “He prayed alone and he prayed in community in the synagogue and on grassy fields. He worshiped and he healed people. He reflected on Scripture and he taught astounding new insights. He fasted and he fed the hungry. He rested in quiet places and he ministered in noisy crowds. He withdrew on retreat and he was patient with people who interrupted him,” says Bill Gaultiere. In our 24/7 fast-paced culture which overemphasizes productivity and self-sufficiency, finding the balance Jesus did in his life can be at best challenging and at worst something we completely ignore. When we disregard Jesus’ invitation to join him on the mountain for those quiet moments away from our work in the valley below, we do so to our soul’s detriment.

In my electronic devotion on Thursday this quote from Sister Joan Chittister appeared: “When we finally take that step toward being honest about what we ourselves really believe, really want to do, really enjoy most, are really most committed to doing for others—we become a person who is a gift to the rest of the human race.” I believe we take the steps towards this kind of honesty only after we step out of the busyness of our lives and enter into the solitude with Jesus as our guide. In this Stewardship season I pray that you will recommit yourselves to this journey with me as we seek to embrace the sacred rhythms that connect us to deeper to God’s love and purpose for our lives. Amen.