

A reading from Mark 6:

*<sup>7</sup> He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. <sup>8</sup> He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; <sup>9</sup> but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. <sup>10</sup> He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. <sup>11</sup> If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." <sup>12</sup> So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. <sup>13</sup> They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. <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."*

**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.**

"Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." It is an invitation offered by Jesus to his disciples. (Imagine the invitation today – Jesus, we have all the deserted places we need. How about an invitation about coming together? We have rested enough.) I find it amusing that for many of us, we are learning new routines – routines of rest, solitude, silence. Not exactly bad things – just a little more challenging when they are forced upon us instead of being offered to us. The early church desert fathers and mothers who left their communities to commune with God on a full-time basis would be proud.

The disciples have been incredibly busy with preaching, teaching, and healing over the past few weeks and now have returned to be with Jesus. And now that you have returned to be with Jesus, perhaps as a disciple, you have finally come to the conclusion that just maybe following this Jesus is going to be way more work than you thought and when this boat finally makes it to the shore you better sneak away and escape this crazy group before something really blows your mind. Like Jesus offering you God's love, forgiveness, or even more outrageous, eternal life. Yeah, who knows what Jesus, because of his incredible love for you, might do next—so it is definitely time to get out of the boat and go on your way alone. Because when the going gets rough, the tough get going? Or maybe better yet, when the going gets rough, most people leave until the rough stuff is over.

Are there times in our lives that we would rather get up and go instead of staying for the long haul through the rough stuff? Times when it would be easier to get out of the marriage than to stay and work it out. Easier not to sit next to the kid at lunch who always eats alone than to sit down next to them for a half an hour. Easier to write a check to charity than to get in and get our hands dirty ourselves. Easier to make fun of the person who is different from you instead of introducing yourself and creating a friendship. Easier to smile and say hi while out walking in your neighborhood instead of asking people for their names which you may have forgotten and are now too embarrassed to ask. Easier to hunker down at home, in these strange times, than spend your abundant free time calling old friends – reconnecting – telling old stories.

A teacher observed that one of the little boys in her class was pensive and withdrawn. "What are you worried about?" she asked. "My parents," he replied. "Mom and dad work all day to keep me clothed and fed and sent to the best school in town. And they even work overtime to be able to send me to college. Then they come home and spend most of the evening, cooking and cleaning and ironing and shopping so I have nothing to worry about." "Why, then are you worried?" "I'm afraid they might try to escape!"

The little boy was afraid. Afraid his parents might decide he was too much work and sneak off in the middle of the night. Afraid his parents might not be in for the long haul. And yet for some reason they stay. The parents stay in the life of the little boy for the same reason that Jesus stays in your life and in mine. Love. Everything Jesus has done, is doing, and will do is out of love for you and for me. "Come away to a deserted place all by

yourselves and rest a while.” Jesus offers an invitation to his disciples and to you and to me out of love and care for us. Jesus knows the difficulties we struggle through, the addictions we cannot overcome, the broken relationships we cannot heal, the deep dark secrets that we hold on to out of fear. Jesus knows all of that and because he knows—Jesus offers us an invitation. He says, “when things are at their worst—I stand beside you and walk with you. When things seem to be more than you can bear—I will bear them with you or better yet, I will bear them for you.” The invitation today sounds much like another invitation Jesus makes at the beginning of his ministry as he begins to teach his disciples. “Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)

The invitation Jesus makes today reminds us that we are not alone in the long hauls, and the difficult days. In the struggles, the addictions, the broken relationships, the long hours of loneliness, and the dark secrets—Jesus is there offering light into our darkness. Jesus promises to be present with us in this life and in the next. There is nothing you or I can do to separate us from the love and presence of God in Jesus Christ. We are a people who follow the way of Jesus Christ. More importantly, we are a people who hear in Scripture that we live in, with, and under the promises of God made to us in our baptism. May those promises ring in our ears that we might have hearts filled with the joy of knowing that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.