

Hinde Street Methodist Church

Sunday 19th July 2015 10am

Val Reid

Call to worship

So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens,
but you are citizens with the saints
and also members of the household of God,
built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,
with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.
In him the whole structure is joined together
and grows into a holy temple in the Lord;
in whom you also are built together spiritually
into a dwelling place for God.

Ephesians 2: 19-22

Collect

Grant us Lord,
not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly;
and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away,
to hold fast to those things which last forever;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught.

³¹ 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.

³² And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.

³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them.

³⁴As 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.

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat.

⁵⁴When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, ⁵⁵and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was.

⁵⁶And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the market-places, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Sermon

Dead-battery anxiety is officially a *thing*.

It's that terrible fear that you forgot to charge your phone.

The battery icon is showing you that you only have a few minutes left.

If you make a call, or send a text, the phone will die even sooner.

You will be cut off from everyone and everything that gives life meaning – your friends, Facebook, twitter, eBay.

Last week Robin Lee was arrested for charging his iPhone from a socket on a London Overground train, a socket which was marked for staff use only.

He was de-arrested soon afterwards.

But he justified his action by saying that he needed to be 'on' at all times.

The previous week 19-year old Nick Silvestri jumped onto the stage at a Broadway theatre and tried to plug his dying smartphone into a socket on the set.

It was just a fake socket.

A stage prop.

This was acting, after all.

But, as he said, his phone was showing only 5% – what would you do?

Being out of touch.

- Is it a documented fear – named in 2012 as nomophobia?
- Or is it a state of utopia which we should all be aiming for?

In today's gospel reading, the apostles have just come back from the mission Jesus has sent them on.

Out they went, two by two, taking nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no bag, no money, no spare clothes.

Totally dependent on the hospitality of those they met.

And it was a successful mission, Mark tells us.

They cast out many demons.

They cured many who were sick.

But it must have been exhausting.

Living with that degree of vulnerability.

Encountering so many people, so much need.

Taking the risk of praying for a cure, anointing the sick with oil, waiting to see whether God would work in this situation...

Jesus recognised that what they needed was a quiet space.

Time to debrief from all that they had done.

Time to recover their energy.

Time to reconnect with each other, and with him.

And so he invites them away to a deserted place.

Eremos topos.

The same words used for the place where Jesus spent 40 days at the start of his ministry.

For the place where Jesus withdrew to pray after his first healing miracles.

Come away from the crowds.

Turn off your phones.

Be out of touch for a bit.

Be silent.

Use that quiet to repair your overworked souls.

But of course it doesn't work out quite like that.

Jesus and the disciples go off in a boat looking for that longed-for deserted place.

And the crowds see them go, and recognise them, and hurry there ahead of them.

So when they arrive, instead of peace and quiet, they find more people, more need, more demands on their time, more work to do.

I recognise this pattern from the gospels.

When Sue and I were preparing last Sunday's all-age worship, we started with the Old Testament lectionary reading – David dancing before the Ark of the Lord.

Our theme was different ways of coming to God in worship.

We wanted to find a contrasting passage – Jesus going up a mountain to a quiet place to pray.

'Don't worry,' said Sue, 'I'll find a gospel story about this.'

But she couldn't.

Only half a verse here, half a verse there.

Each time Jesus goes up a mountain, or out to a deserted place, to pray, he is accosted by the crowds.

And every time his response is the same.

He doesn't say, 'Sorry, this is my scheduled time off. Come back in an hour.

Come back tomorrow.'

He has compassion on them, because they are like sheep without a shepherd.

Splag-(ch)nis-thê

Literally, his bowels twisted.

Just as he intuited the needs of his weary friends, so he felt, deep in his gut, the passionate longing of these people.

For what?

The same as the disciples.

To be heard.

To be met.

To be fed.

It would be tempting to create a simple moral to this story.

It could either be: turn off your phones.

Avoid nomophobia.

Make space to find God, to find meaning in your life.

Or it could be: stop being selfish.
Be alert to the needs of others.
Love your neighbour as yourself.

But I think it is more subtle than that.
More nuanced.
It's not a straightforward either/or.

Today's lectionary passage omits the two miracles at the heart of this story.
Jesus feeds the crowds.

And then he sends his disciples off in a boat to Bethsaida, and goes up a mountain to pray.

When evening came, Mark tells us, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land.

They were straining at the oars against an adverse wind.

Although this is two millennia before Freud, I can't help thinking we have a fascinating picture here.

Isolated on a mountain the superego tries to get in touch with higher things.
While the id is struggling and sweating in a storm on the lake.

And what happens next?

He came towards them early in the morning walking on the sea.

Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased.

The disparate parts of the psyche are brought back together.

Calm is restored.

And, as we heard, when they landed, people came from all over the region bringing the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was.

All who touched even the hem of his cloak were healed.

What Jesus offers – to his disciples – to the desperate crowds – to us – is integration.

Silence and prayer on its own doesn't make for a whole life.
But nor does rushing around performing endless tasks.
We are just *straining at the oars against an adverse wind*.

Jesus pays attention to what is going on – in himself and in others.

The disciples have had all this rich mission experience, and they need time and space with their teacher to reflect on what it means.
The crowd have recognised in Jesus and his friends an authentic something – an in-touch-ness with God – which has the power to restore and make whole.
And they long for it with all their hearts.

So Jesus knows when to make space for quiet.
But he also knows when to listen to his heart – his gut – and tune in to the needs of the people who cluster around him.
He is utterly present to the quiet.
And to the crowds.
He can find God in both.

And we need to find that balance in our own lives too.
Not so addicted to connection that dead battery syndrome has us palpitating with anxiety.
Nor so out of touch with life that the cry of humanity can't get through.

And whatever we do – up a mountain in silence with our God, in the marketplace in all the crush and stench of needy people – we do it with our whole attention.
And we do it with Jesus.
Amen.