

Pray

Over the last two weeks we have booked two breaks away... or should I say I have as unfortunately Michael only get to come on one of them. One is a short time of retreat for me before my future licensing and the other is a week away for us both after my licensing but before we fully embrace life in the Rectory!! The booking of both was driven by the desire to be 'away' to find space to disconnect from the world and to embrace a different pace of life and find a place to embrace a more Holy life. To put it bluntly we want to escape. How many of you longed for the reopening of holiday accommodations and destinations? I think on some level we all long for the opportunity to escape the world... yet this gospel portion demands the opposite of us. This morning's passage from John tells us that even though we want to escape the world we are actually called and sent into the world to share in it and shape it with God.

This doesn't mean the desire to escape is wrong. In fact, it's even more understandable in many ways for those of us who have faith to want to leave behind the world that fails to represent this faith... We want to retreat from the world because we have the internal certainty that the world could actually be better. We long for peace and tranquillity because something of our own identities as Christians demand this... The history of the Christian faith is full of people seeking out separation and retreat, the monasteries, nunneries, the hermits, and mystics of old. Today we have retreat centres and spiritual breaks. It's natural to seek

spaces which are unencumbered by the world and that allow for a fuller realisation of a holy life. We know peace and calm; rhythm and prayer are things which can sustain us. Of course, I keep saying 'we' but there may be many of us who find the idea of retreat horrifying and that's okay too! It doesn't mean you don't belong to God but in fact means you're perhaps better hardwired to minister for him in the world.

I believe that it isn't just Christians who have the desire to retreat either... Monasteries often host non-religious visitors, and over the recent years there has been a rise in Cathedral worship attendance, and attendance of sung BCP Services as well as the rediscovery of mindfulness which is so very linked to the mystics and to Christian contemplation. Those who attend not due to a religious faith often talk about the desire for an 'escape from the ordinary...' There is, it seems to me, something in the human soul that cries out for a world that is different. Quieter, more ordered, less stressful, and overwhelming. There is longing in many people for something else... something more. A different type of 'world' to belong to.

And of course, this is the truth. As our gospel reading this morning states: people are called to belong to God and not to the world. This passage reminds us that we are called to root our identities in God and to minister to the world... But this gospel passage is one which requires some focus and attention to understand and the language which is repetitive can be complicated to unpick. It is a part of Jesus'

farewell narrative and a prayer for the disciples. The first few verses are Jesus explaining that the disciples now understand that Jesus is God and God's son. That they now understand Jesus' power and teachings come from God:

"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

He then goes on to ask God the father to look after the disciples because they belong to God. That they are God's people called by his name. Stating that whilst he was with them Jesus led them by his example and kept them safe in the world:

I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled.

Remember of course that Jesus did not spend his ministry on earth in retreat but in contrast he engaged with the world. Finally, we have these verses:

But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Here Jesus states that he taught and gave the disciples the ability to know joy... to know life in all its fullness. He says simply that he doesn't want the disciples to be taken out of the world but to be protected within it. They don't belong to the world because they are sanctified- made holy by God's word.

We don't belong to the world we belong to God. The world does not give us our identity. We are not milkman, bus driver, administrator, nor are we anxious person or successful person etc. These are not our identities. Our identity is beloved, chosen and called Child of God. This identity is what we need to remember and hold onto and it

is this truth, that we are loved beyond our understanding no matter our actions etc. that we move from. It is our base and foundation that we build on. We should work from a place of rest and being assured... Jesus is our pattern for this and let's not forget that Jesus did sometimes retreat from the world to be alone with God. So, our desire to get away is not to be ignored. We need embrace it to give ourselves space and time to reconnect with God. To re-stabilise our foundation before working the world. But we are not called to disengage from the world completely. We are called instead to engage in it as Jesus did. To seek to make it a better place. To seek justice, equity, peace, LOVE, and truth...

So, this week I want us all to think about what it is we need to do to reconnect with our sure foundation in God, to remind ourselves of our identity as chosen and loved people. Is it to find a quiet, special place? Perhaps you could go and spend some time in the grounds of St. James? Or outside in reflection? Perhaps you need to put aside time to read scripture or even to book a day away in silence and reflection... Or maybe you'd like to engage with some contemplative prayer... our quiet space services are all on YouTube! As are Canon John's excellent talks on the resurrection if you want to stretch your mind and think deeply... Whatever your soul is craving can you make a step towards quenching it this week?

And then from there. From a place of connection and belonging to God can you look to engage with the world.

To speak truth and challenge injustice? To love those who are not being loved. To do as Jesus did and as we are called to do as his followers who belong to God and not the world. Amen.