

Sermon *Come Away and Rest for Awhile*
The Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 7.21.24

I went to a church that had these words painted on the wall of their Parish Hall: *All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.* You've probably seen churches that have the words *Holy Holy Holy* inscribed across the front of the altar so that all who enter the church can read them. What Bible quote would you use for this church?

In my seminary in Berkeley, California, there was a large banner placed over the main entrance that read, *To You All Hearts Are Open.* In one of the leading academic seminaries in the country, all the students walk under the banner that reads "all hearts are open" and to God, no secrets are hid. It was quite a way to start off each new year. What would our phrase be here at All Angels?

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus said, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." That phrase speaks to the core of our mission and ministry on this island. First, "Come away." None of us were born here. We all had to heed the call to come away. Some from far away, some from Sarasota, but we all had to agree to travel over water to get to this barrier island (in which there is no direct bridge to; one must go through other islands to get here). *Come away.* Amen, amen indeed.

"To a deserted place." Have you heard the series of questions that start with, "What would you bring to a deserted island?" "What one book would you bring to a deserted island?" "If you could only listen to one type of music on a deserted island..." "What family member would you bring..." Look folks, we are on a deserted island. Every cartoon depiction of a deserted island looks like Longboat Key – lots of sand surrounded by calm, beautiful blue-green tropical water, a few palm trees; no schools, no hospitals, or airports, or chain restaurants, it's clean, well-manicured, and has absolutely no nightlife. Let's face it, this is the deserted island we've been looking for! And look, you can bring more than one book, or one movie, or one family member. *Come away to a deserted place.*

"All by yourselves." How many of you have all your family members on Longboat? How about all your friends? That's what I thought. You left some people somewhere else. Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves. Recently, when we went on vacation to California to see family, someone told me that it's not a "vacation" if you are visiting family. But, on Longboat, you get to choose who to bring, or to see. It's a deserted place, all by ourselves, to come away to.

"And rest a while." This is the key to the message from Jesus. He is calling us away, by ourselves, to rest a while. We can find rest for ourselves at All Angels on Longboat Key. All we have to do is come away.

Did you pick up on the theme of today's readings? The prophet Jeremiah spoke about bad shepherds who harm and divide the sheep and that God will raise up a good shepherd who will heal, restore and bring peace to the flock. We had Psalm 23 – "The Lord (say it with me) is my shepherd, I shall not want." In this psalm the shepherd brings the sheep to calm waters, green pastures and finds rest and peace for the sheep. That's what a good shepherd does. Sheep can get stressed out and worry all on their own. Sheep, and humans, can do that all by ourselves. The

good shepherd, in comparison, will calm the sheep and bring them to places of rest. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. I believe our Shepherd is a teaching shepherd. He shepherds us by asking questions and helping us to seek the answer. Near the end of today's Gospel lesson, Jesus had compassion on all the people because "they were like sheep without a shepherd. He taught them." We have a teaching shepherd.

Once in a while, I get asked what the meaning of life is. My answer is this: the meaning of life is to learn. We are here to learn. There is a lesson, or many lessons, for us to learn while we are here. We've been given a gigantic, and beautiful, scientific experiment and laboratory. There is something here for all of us to learn. And our teaching shepherd knows the lessons that we need to learn are not the same for each person. The pedagogy of our teaching shepherd is action and reflection. First action – try something, do something, experiment, fail, learn; but, most importantly, do some sort of action. Second, and equally important, is to reflection on the action. Action and reflection. This world rewards action; but, God is calling us to reflect. God is calling us to come away, to a deserted place, all by ourselves, and rest a while – to reflect on what we have experienced in life.

Think of it this way: to build muscle, one must have an action, like lifting weights, and then to take a rest from lifting weights. You can't lift every day and expect your muscles to grow; in fact, you'll probably hurt yourself. It's action and reflection. Lift and rest. Lift and rest. And again, our society rewards, richly, those who metaphorically lift and lift and lift. However, God is calling us, teaching us, to come away and find rest and reflection.

If you looked closely at the Biblical citation of today's lesson from Mark, you'll see that we skipped some passages. Jesus sent his disciples out to do the work of the Kingdom. He then called them back and took them away to reflect (to rest) on all that they had done. We skipped over what they had done and instead focused on the call to get away and rest.

In order to get to live on Longboat, or nearby, you have had to have worked hard and saved. For many of us, it was work work work and very little rest. Well, you are now away, on a deserted island, to rest and reflect. You've done your action; now it is time for reflection.

One of our church members participates with us online while walking on the beach. Our worship service is her deserted time, by herself, to find rest for herself. It's a gift that we give her and many others. Speaking of which, every week, I see at least one person walking through our garden. They will stop, listen to the music we are playing and will take a seat on one of the benches. They have heard the call – come away, by yourself, to a deserted place and find rest. And we at All Angels are providing them with it. Jesus is the Great Shepherd, we – All Angels – are the stewards of the green pasture and calm water. Some of you sit in the sanctuary before the service begins and rest and reflect. You too have heeded the call of the shepherd to come away and find rest for a while.

I had a conversation this week with one of Elijah's youth leaders. She was hobbling around. Her knee had swelled to about twice its normal size. She said, "Pastor, can you say a prayer for my knee to get better." Before I did, I felt the Shepherd was telling me to wait and to ask a question. I asked what she was doing to make it better. Do you think she took time off from work? Did she

rest her leg, elevate it and find rest for herself? Or did she power through the pain. Yeah, well, society rewards those who power through. (I am guilty of this, many many times over) I asked if she would like to know what the Bible says about leg injuries. She nodded. I gulped and said, “It’s from over work and not taking rest. Moses, to Jacob, to others who have had hip, leg or foot injuries – they were overperforming and didn’t take time to rest.” Just between you and me, I much prefer to be a priest who offers words of comfort. But, from time to time, I am called to offer words of challenge and not comfort. This was one of those times. At the risk of being hypocritical, I can tell you I’d much prefer to work work work and rest later. At the same time, I hear the words of our Savior and Shepherd – come away and rest for a while.

Let’s look at this another way. When you have injured your hand, an arm, or your leg, does your doctor or your physical therapist tell you to put weight on the injured part and to keep doing what you are doing; or does your medical professional tell you to rest it? Yeah, we all know it’s to rest. And we all know how many times we did not listen to that advice. Well, Jesus is calling us, heart, body, and soul to come away and rest for a while.

Have you heard the phrase, Men of Leisure? It originally was a label for priests in the Church of England. As the industrial revolution was going on, and many were working in the factories and in the farms, the Church of England priests were men of leisure – they had the ability to rest and to ponder and to offer theological reflection on the lives of all those who were working. I imagine my 21st century schedule is busier than the lives of the clergy who served a few centuries ago; but, I am also a man of leisure. Jesus has called me to come away, to a deserted place, by myself and to rest a while. In this leisure, I write a 700-word theological reflection for you every week and write a sermon. Rest balances me to pray for you and with you. It allows me to be a positive force in our community and in our diocese. Yet, I too am tempted to not rest. My savior is also calling me to do the same as you – to come away and rest for a while. I am blessed beyond measure to come to this deserted island (in the hot summer months, it is really deserted) and to help you all, and myself, to find rest for a while.

What Bible quote would you place over the church? How about, “Come away, by yourselves, to a deserted place and find rest.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.