

Gleaning In The Fields Of Light

Leaving IT All Behind

“The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, ‘Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile.’ For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in a boat to a deserted place by themselves.”

—the Gospel of Mark

By Ken Woodley

The apostles’ energy reserves were drained to the dregs.

And even the dregs had nothing left to give.

They’d walked everywhere telling as many people as they could about the Kingdom of Heaven. They had blisters on their feet and aches and pains all over.

Jesus heard the fatigue in their voices.

Saw the lines of weariness on their faces.

Discerned the stoop of shoulders.

Jesus had been there and felt all of that.

He understood the danger of burning up all of one’s physical, spiritual and emotional fuel without pausing to re-fill the tank.

Such self-neglect could have dire consequences to them personally and to their mission.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus regularly went off “to a lonely place” by himself, re-charging his batteries through prayer, contemplation and just plain rest.

He knew the prescription the Apostles needed to have filled for their rejuvenation: Go off to that lonely place and rest.

Jesus' advice is timelessly wise. But going off to a lonely place can be nearly impossible because most of us carry the crowded world and all of its incessant distractions everywhere with us:

Smart phones. The digital umbilical cord connecting us to static chatter and hubbub.

Can't live with them.

Can't live without them.

When the Apostles went off to that quiet hillside by the sea for their spiritual retreat, they did not take the compulsive demands of social media with them. They never faced that temptation.

Texts and emails did not call upon their time. The only tweets came from the birds singing among the trees at dawn. There were no incoming Instagram messages to respond to. If you'd said "Facebook" to them, they would have wondered what in the world you were talking about.

Yes, the apostles could have found effective ways to incorporate social media into their mission, spreading The Gospel by streaming Jesus live, putting the Sermon on the Mount on YouTube.

Just as all of us are fortunate to have social media as a useful tool to expand our ability to communicate and connect. As you and I are doing now. But we need to manage our social media rather than be managed by it.

Today, Jesus would have this additional piece of advice for his Apostles: "Oh, yes, and before you go off to that lonely place to rest, leave your smart phones with me. And your iPads. Laptops, too. Otherwise, you will never find a lonely place. Every hillside, shaded glen and mountaintop will be filled to overflowing with the world and its distractions."

We'd be wise to listen to him. Our lonely place might be a quiet room in the house, the shade of a tree in the back yard, the sanctuary of our church on a Tuesday morning or Thursday afternoon, or some favorite trail at a local state park.

When we go to those lonely places to re-charge, let's turn the technological world off and leave it behind. Without the its siren song, we can better hear the small, quiet voice of the Holy Spirit in our soul.

And therefore bring it back with us into the world when our rest is done, ready for where the Holy Spirit next guides our footsteps.