

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Lena, IL – 6 August 2023**  
**Tenth Sunday after Pentecost - Year A – Lectionary 18**

**1st Reading: *Isaiah 55:1-5***

**Psalm: *145:8-9, 14-21***

**2nd Reading: *Romans 9:1-5***

**Gospel: *Matthew 14:13-21***

**Sermon - *Vicar Thomas J. Mosbø***

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

I need a vacation. I need some time to get away from it all.

I know we all feel that way from time to time, and summertime is, of course, the most popular time to take vacations. In England they say they are “on Holiday” instead of “on vacation”, and that way of saying it has become more comfortable for me as well.

I read an article once when we were in England that described three different types of holiday-makers. There is the “beach bum” who just likes to sit by the beach and do nothing. There is the “culture vulture” who likes to take in all the sights, visit museums and whatnot. And then there is the “adrenalin junkie” - and I thought there was a better term for that, but I couldn’t find one on the internet, who likes to engage in as many sports as possible - hang gliding, rock climbing, hiking 48 miles in four days, and the like.

We had some friends from when we lived in the south of England who were beach bums. Every year they would go on holiday to Spain, go to the exact same hotel in the same town, and just sit in the hot sun by the sea. The wife would take a novel along to read, and the husband drank cheap Spanish wine all day. And then later in the year they would go to Craster, a town on the Northumbrian coast, not too far from where we lived after we moved up north, famous for its kippers - smoked fish that some English people like for breakfast. There they would sit under the clouds by the cold sea, read novels, eat kippers, and drink cheap English ale. Not quite my notion of the ideal holiday, but they seemed to enjoy just sitting and doing nothing.

I don't know right off hand anyone I would classify as an adrenalin junkie, a sports buff, but I certainly know of people who like to climb up steep rocks, go sky-diving out of airplanes, bicycle across Iowa, or hike for seventy miles alongside Hadrian's Wall from one side of England to the other. And again, they seem to enjoy such activities as a way to "get away from it all".

Most of you had a chance to meet our "adopted" German daughter Susanne when she was here a couple of weeks ago. When I first read that article about the different categories of holiday-makers, she was visiting us in England from Germany, and she asked us which category we fell under. When I said we were definitely "culture vultures", she sighed in relief and said, "Good. Me, too."

We always like to visit the historical sites - castles, cathedrals, stately mansions, and take in the museums or art galleries, whatever a particular place has to offer. So when Susanne and her family were here, Coral took them to see Ulysses S. Grant's house in Galena, and we spent another day at the Mississippi River museum in Dubuque.

There were some other friends of ours, who had been Coral's next-door neighbors in New York, that we would like to see when they came to England - and they spent a lot of time in their retirement years touring Europe. Now, they were atheistic Jews - Jews by heritage who didn't believe in God - but we got on quite well with them, and we often met up with them at cathedrals in England - which you might not think would be particularly attractive to atheistic Jews - but they viewed them as works of humanistic architecture and admired them as such. But once, when we were showing them around our beloved Durham Cathedral, the wife sidled up to Coral and me, and in a low voice said, "You know, when you see a place like this, you have to wonder if there isn't something to it after all." Even for confirmed atheists, who had no Christian background at all, something of the divine did seem to touch them there.

Well, that makes me think that perhaps we might add a fourth type of holiday-maker to our list, whom we might call the "religious retreatists". We have often focused our own holidays not just on culture, but on places where we might sense the divine and use our time to pray and perhaps come a little closer to God - whether in Saint Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, Saint Francis's Basilica in Assisi, the holy islands of Iona or Lindisfarne, or in a simple retreat centre like the Northumbrian Community, where we can take time to contemplate, meditate on God's Word, and feel his presence in nature.

Jesus, at the beginning of today's Gospel reading, says: "I need a vacation. I need some time to get away from it all."

"Now when Jesus heard [about the beheading of John the Baptist], he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself."

And this is not the only instance where Jesus goes off alone, sometimes up on a mountain, to pray alone. Even Jesus, the Son of God, needed time to be alone and pray. He needed a religious retreat away from the crowds and the noise of everyday life.

He was not always very successful in being able to take such time to pray. In today's Gospel, the crowds follow him, so that by the time he has finished praying and reached the other shore of the lake, there are 5,000 people waiting for him, coming to him for help:

"When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick."

But even then they wouldn't go away, even though they were in a wilderness where there was no food to eat. And in response, Jesus performs one of his most important miracles, the only one recorded in all four Gospels - the feeding of the 5,000 with only 5 loaves of bread and two fish - probably not kippers, however.

So Jesus, as exhausted as he is, as much in need of a spiritual retreat, time to pray and recuperate from all his work just before then, exerts even more energy to help and sustain people. There is never a case where Jesus refuses to help anyone, no matter what his own condition might be - even in the Garden of Gethsemane, when they have come to arrest him, try him, and execute him, he stops to heal the ear of the slave of the high priest.

We all need to take time to pray, to retreat from the hectic aspects of our lives, to be fed by Jesus. The crowd of 5,000 needed a spiritual retreat and needed to be fed by Jesus. And Jesus will never refuse us when we come to be fed by him.

He is here with us now, offering us the bread of life in the sacrament of his body and blood. For a short time this morning we are all together seeking God - every Sunday is a bit of a religious retreat - and we are ready to hear his Word and to be fed with spiritual food. And as the liturgy of the Church of England says, "Take and eat it in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving."

Amen!

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