

9th Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 11, Year B

“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 a while.’ For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.”

Two weeks ago, our Gospel spoke of Jesus instructing his disciples before going out around the villages to teach and preach and heal; he warned them that some would listen and some would not. Let’s imagine ourselves as one of Jesus’ twelve apostles making our way in a strange place: Mark refers to them as apostles – one who is sent out – rather than disciples or students. I am a stranger in a new place; It’s obvious that I’m lost; I may be welcomed right away or I may have to ring seven or eight doorbells before the door is not slammed in my face. Finally, I’m invited - rather tentatively - to enter and stay for a time. Having been shown a venue which allows for seating, people begin to gather out of curiosity and I begin to talk about Jesus – what he has taught me about God who he calls “Father,” what he has taught me about myself and what he has taught me about the world and how we are all adopted children of God. A woman approaches me with a bad rash on her arm and I put my hand on her forehead and ask that she be healed in the name of God the Father.

Judging from our Gospel’s first sentence, the apostles were full of excitement and must have had some degree of success, as taking time to sit and eat was far from their minds. They chatter away, telling of their experiences. Jesus’ reaction to their news is to tell them to come away to a deserted place and rest: “shield the joyous,” we say in one of our evening prayers. That must have been somewhat disappointing for the disciples: we went out, we preached, we taught, we even healed; aren’t you proud of us? We become so excited with our successes, our busy-nesses, we wear them as badges and they become a huge part of

our identity. But in doing so, we often lose sight of why we are doing, for whom are we doing, and who gives us the strength and ability to do. It recently occurred to me that addiction and idolatry are, if not siblings, then at least first cousins. We think of addiction most often as a psychological and/or physical dependency on a substance, often alcohol or cocaine or painkillers. And perhaps we think of idolatry as those folks in Hebrew Scripture who melted their jewelry to produce a golden calf while Moses was up on the mountaintop talking with God. Both addiction and idolatry involve something very powerful, taking over our lives, taking precedence over relationships, responsibilities, commitments, health concerns. The obvious difference is that addiction usually involves intentionally introducing a chemical into our bodies, whereas idolatry centers around an idea that enters our thinking, either born in our own brain or put there by an outside source: I'm thin but I need to be thinner, I'm too fat and everyone laughs at me, I'm the smartest in my class but smart enough to get into Harvard, my yoga studio is the key to your problems, this golden calf attracts more worshippers than any God of yours. It's wonderful to wake up every morning, motivated with new ideas: what am I going to accomplish, how can I show everyone how serious I am about my work, how it totally consumes my life; but if you feel your life being taken over by your sense of accomplishment, perhaps it's time to slow down. Martha and Mary come to mind. Remember the story? Martha is wildly running around the house - cleaning, cooking, straightening, washing, hunting, gathering - and complains to Jesus that her sister is just sitting around, and can't Jesus tell Mary to help with the chores. Jesus' response always strikes the Martha in me as rather harsh: "Mary has chosen the better part," Jesus says. In other words, Mary has learned how to slow down and take it all in; Martha, come away with us to a deserted place and rest. We all have Marthas in us, just as we all have Marys but I believe when Jesus tells his disciples to slow down, he's suggesting that perhaps we should put Martha on the back burner for a bit and allow God's restorative peace to shield us. Charlie Nichols, Deacon at St

Stephen's in Middlebury, preached a few weeks ago the message that rather than viewing interruptions in our work as annoying, we should consider them as opportunities to do God's work; if we are constantly busying ourselves, too entangled in our attempts at constant success, we cannot hear God; *our* time does not allow for interruptions, thereby causing us to bypass the opportunities with which God graces us to ask what God would have us do.

Perhaps we should look at our efforts as they relate to our jobs, our church work, our family, even (and possibly most importantly) our leisure time – let's look at all these honestly and ask ourselves, for whom are we doing this? Are we trying to prove something to the world? Are we trying to get ahead for our own sake?" As we strive to be good disciples of Christ, faithful students wanting to do his will, may we not forget Jesus' call to come away to a deserted place and rest, that we might be able to slow down long enough to pray:

*Reclothe us in our rightful mind,
In purer lives thy service find.*

God looked around at what God had done and said it was good.
And God rested on the seventh day.