



## 7th Sunday after Trinity | Sermon – Revd Canon Stan Evans

There is little certainty in life. Possessions can be lost in an instant; conditions are changed overnight. Dreams shattered by an utterance, and passions turn to ashes. These thoughts raced through my mind as we watched the devastation caused by the floods and storms in Germany and across many parts of Europe. It makes you stop and ask – particularly over these past difficult months – who am I? What is the purpose in all of this?

I have found myself going all the way back to my childhood landscape, and then trying to trace the maze of paths leading up to the person we developed into, identifying and dismissing any false indicators as we go along.

In our Epistle from Paul's letter to the young Church in Ephesus, ***no longer are we strangers and aliens, but we are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God – and we too are being built into a spiritual temple with Jesus as the cornerstone.***

Do we really feel that is who we are and where we are at the moment?

In our Gospel the disciples have identified the strain that Jesus was under. *'Come away to a deserted place and rest awhile'*.

What a wonderfully caring bunch of lads he had around him. But even after getting into the boat – as the people recognised him, even as tired as he was and drained, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He even found it difficult to find time to eat. The apostles aim then was to find time for themselves in a peaceful and lonely place.

Lonely places are hard to come by when people are intent on keeping you company. Jesus and the apostles became fugitives, but their escape for privacy doesn't come off. If enjoying privacy depends on the ability to control the amount of access people have to you, Jesus is not very able in that direction. But he is up against impressive opposition.

The people easily see where the boat is heading and their energetic need gets them there first.



Jesus doesn't have the heart to play hide and seek with the crowds.  
The apostolic party disembarks – and they give themselves up –  
and the game is over.

So much for their attempt to get away on a package holiday.  
But by not turning the boat around, and by not sending the besieging crowds  
away, Jesus gives his apostles a profound teaching on the tenderness of God and  
God's people. He demonstrates the truth of his own teaching.

***'Ask and you will receive. Seek, and you will find'.***

The crowds have asked and they do receive; they have sought him out and they  
do find him. When the crowds seek Jesus even at a time when he is seeking  
privacy and quiet reflective time, there is no question which need has priority.  
The schedule of the crowd becomes more important to Jesus than his own.

That's the kind of person Jesus is; that's the kind of God Jesus reveals; that's the  
kind of pity Jesus hopes his apostles will show in their time. That's the kind of  
disciple he wants to find in us if we are going to follow him and fulfil his schedule  
of care.

That is why, you and I, need to take time in peaceful isolation – as I believe has  
happened with so many during this pandemic – to ask the question: Who am I?  
Am I the devoted follower of Jesus – devoted enough to help further his mission  
of reconciling the world to God through him?

But we need that discipline if we are not going to burn out in the process. Jesus  
knew his time was limited – his contract would run out in three years.

Of course, this Gospel passage is not an argument against havens or holidays;  
rather, it does serve to highlight the urgent love of Jesus for people in need. Jesus'  
original plan for the apostles underlines the importance of spending time apart  
and the importance of rest and recovery. The apostles are not robots, they also  
have to rest sometime. **Service and solitude must go hand in hand.**

For many of us, solitude is commonly seen as a state of pain. It is something to  
run from as we hunt down companionship and something to do. Let one half of a  
married couple retire to another room, shut the door and gaze fixedly at a far  
wall, and the other half is likely to pursue with the anxious question, *'Are you  
feeling ok?'* or *'What are you mad at me about?'*

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ANGLICAN PARISH  
ST. LAURENCE IN LANZAROTE

No, it should be a natural desire to find oneself.  
The real me.

However, solitude can make us uncomfortable; resting can make us feel guilty (particularly as a cleric), especially if we have been brought up to honour a work ethic that equates idleness with laziness.

Stillness is something we have to learn in time. For God speaks to us not only in the urgent cries of other people but also in the '**still, small voice of calm**'. He will speak to us in his own time and might help us to find out "who we are" in these still moments, filling us with purpose.

To hear that voice, we have to be at one with the stillness.

**Lord, help us find time and space for you,  
Setting aside room in our lives to be still  
And know that you are God;  
To draw aside from the bustle of this world  
And to reflect,  
Emptying our minds and opening our hearts  
That we might unlock a window  
Through which to glimpse you more fully  
And respond more freely.  
Meet with us here,  
That we may meet you everywhere,  
In all we do,  
And all we meet,  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen**