



Jesus and the Quiet Place

Kathleen Rushton explains the significance of Jesus going to a quiet place in Mark 1:12-13.

TODAY OUR QUIET moments can be swallowed up easily. We find that the entertainment and information on our digital devices can be irresistible. We have to be deliberate about taking and enjoying quiet.

The hurry of our lives, especially in a family, can leave us with little time for reflection, for being aware of God's presence, for openness to what is good, beautiful and true in our world, for developing our inner being.

Just as we focus on Jesus as "the Truth", we can focus on Jesus as "the Way". By practising the Way of Jesus we can un-hurry our lives.

JESUS SOUGHT A QUIET PLACE

In Mark we read that immediately after his baptism Jesus headed straight into the desert. "The Spirit immediately drove him out in the wilderness (*erēmos*)" (Mk 1:12) where he remained for 40 days.

The Greek word *erēmos* does not necessarily mean desert, heat and sand. Its meanings include a deserted place, a desolate place, a solitary place, a lonely place, a quiet place and a wilderness.

John Mark Comer in *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World*, suggests that following the Way of Jesus calls us to go frequently to "a quiet place".

PLACE TO DEVELOP STRENGTH

In all the Gospels we read that Jesus stops his work and goes to a quiet place. There he finds strength for his participation in mission. There, and only there, he is at the strength of his spiritual powers. He is alone with God.

Mark 1 tells about Jesus's first day on the job as the Messiah. He seems to be up early, teaching in the synagogue (Mk 1:21-28) and healing the mother-in-law of Peter (Mk 1:29-31). That evening, he is up late healing the sick and demonised (Mk 1:32-34). It is a very long day.

Then we discover that "in the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a quiet place (*erēmos*), and there he prayed" (Mk 1:35). Jesus could have slept in but he needed to be up early and away to a quiet place to prepare him for his ministry ahead.

Even after Jesus had been in a quiet place (*erēmos*) for 40 days, when he came back to Capernaum for one day of activity, he headed straight back afterwards to a quiet place to pray. For Jesus, this was an ongoing rhythm in his life.

JESUS'S RHYTHM OF LIFE

Mark's story continues. When Simon and his companions searched for Jesus and found him in a quiet place, they said: "Everyone is searching for you." Jesus is very clear in his reply: "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came to do" (Mk 1:37-38).

Going to a quiet place was a priority for Jesus. He came out of the quiet grounded and centred, and with clarity about his identity and calling. He is in touch with God and with himself.

Later Jesus invites the disciples who were dead tired after a long stretch of working in the reign of God to: "Come away to a quiet place (*erēmos*) all by yourselves and rest a while" (Mk 6:31). The Gospel continues: "And they went away in the boat to a quiet place (*erēmos*) by themselves" (Mk 6:32).

John Comer interprets Jesus's invitation for today's readers as: "What you really need isn't a beer or a night out at the movies. What you really need is time alone with me. But to do that, we need to get away from all that noise and people."

WORKING WITH THE REALITY

As we know too well, our intention to withdraw from busyness can be subverted by everyday demands. The Gospel says that many had seen Jesus and the disciples leaving in the boat and they had hurried around the shoreline ahead of them. When they landed a large crowd was already there. The story says that it was "very late" and Jesus "had compassion on them" and fed them with loaves and fish.

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Life happens. People call on our time and attention. Our desire for a quiet evening can be sabotaged when our children cannot sleep. A friend is troubled and needs to chat. Like Jesus and the disciples, we often have to attend to immediate demands before we can rest.

The Gospel shows that the needs of others do not overtake the need to refresh ourselves. While he dismissed the crowd, Jesus made the disciples go ahead of him by boat to Bethsaida. Then he "went up the mountain to pray ... he was alone on the land" (Mk 6:46-47).

Withdrawing to a quiet place is part of the rhythm of Jesus's life and is an important theme in Mark's Gospel.

OUR OWN PRACTICE

This year Lent begins on 14 February. During the 40 days of Lent we might intentionally develop a practice of quiet reflection as following the Way of Jesus. It could be a place or a space to "come away" – a quiet time at home or in a nearby park; time alone before the morning family routine kicks in; while we're waiting for the bus; walking the dog or driving to work.

This quiet place time apart helps to orient our lives towards goodness – towards our participation in God's mission. We take the place and space time we have with gratitude. We slow down. Breathe. Come into the present.

Through this ancient yet ever-new practice we are accepting the Gospel invitation to stay alert to where God is moving in our lives and in our world and refreshing ourselves so that we are ready to respond as disciples of Jesus.

Mark 1:9-15: Reading for First Sunday of Lent 18 February

Jesus in the Desert www.freebibleimages.org

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