

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Called to Quiet and to Action"
Dr. J. Dent

July 31, 2011

The Christian life has many goals and callings. I have tried in July to list a number of these callings. The first was a call to rest, and the fact that we all need some downtime, and the summer is one of those seasons. The second was a call to listen, not only as a musician or choir member, but also as a human being, primarily to God but also in all our relationships. The third was a call to hope, because we are all tempted to lose the hope we have in this life, so we turn back to the Lord, and often with the help of the gift of music we receive hope again. The fourth was a call to prayer, for certainly our life is sustained and made meaningful in large part due to our conversations with the Lord. Today, on this fifth Sunday of July, I note that sometimes these goals and callings appear to contradict one another, but they do not. Today I have listed a call to both quiet and to action. How can this be? Is not a quiet life one that does not highly value action?

I suggest these qualities based on the passage we read from Matthew 14. There we find Jesus moving away to a quiet place to be by himself. He certainly did this in part due to the fact he just received the news that his cousin and friend John had been murdered. He felt the loss, just as we do. And he needed some time alone to consider how this could be, and how it would affect him. I also believe he had some sense of the fact that his own life would be shorter, and he too would be called to sacrifice as John had been. We all need time to consider who we are, where we have come from, where we are going and if we can, think a lot about the "why" of how we are spending time and what we are called to be and do.

The reflective life, the devotional life, the inner life needs quiet like plants need sun, soil and water. So Jesus in his earthly life and ministry took quiet time for himself. This is not to say that there weren't obstacles and challenges to making this quiet time happen. The Scriptures also tell us that the crowds were looking for him at the same time as he was looking to be alone. Everything that is worth taking time to do will have a challenge or an obstacle or a competing event in the path of our choosing God's way. What is that obstacle or competition for God's ways in your life in these days? How will you choose for God, against the obstacle or challenge?

The quiet in Jesus' life calls us to the quiet needed in our life. We need time to receive the love we need from the Father. We need time to consider how we might ask God to remove our defects of character, take inventory of what we need to work on, and simply enjoy the quiet to take in the facts and feelings of our lives. We need to forgive others who have hurt us, and remove that chain they might have upon us. All this happens in the quiet. I can't do it while watching TV, while listening to the radio nor when the computer is on, competing for my attention. I am easily distracted. How about you?

So making a decision for some quiet, today, Sunday, and every other day is a life changing decision. Do so and tell someone you love the difference it makes for you.

The other part of Jesus' life was the action he took. All of us take actions everyday. Whether we are retired, or on a break from school, or working part time or full time, whether we are looking after children or grandchildren, whatever we are doing in our lives, we take action everyday. So the question is what choices we will make with our actions.

If you are looking at the Matthew 14 passage, you will note that everything I have said thus far comes from verse 13. Once Jesus comes away from that time alone, he finds that the crowds have found him. Rather than being annoyed or angry or upset in any way with the relative lack of privacy in his life, he finds himself moved by the crowd. He has compassion for them.

I've mentioned before that "compassion" in the Greek language of the NT is actually being moved deeply within, literally in your guts. Jesus has the prophetic gift of sensing some, if not all of the people's needs. So you can imagine him coming into a crowd, that he is deeply moved. The Scriptures record in verse 14 of Matthew 14 that he healed the sick. So Jesus senses the need of the context, trusts God the Father, and moves into this healing ministry.

Many of us have healing ministries. They may not be characterized as miraculous, but they are wonderful nevertheless. We can listen to people. We can ask them what they want to see happen to be healed and whole. We can offer any wisdom we have. We can offer to pray for healing for the person, whether that is an emotional or psychological or physical healing. If they agree, we can pray for them. There are no special words or formula to

do this. We can, if we take the risk, just as Jesus did. Some will be healed. I have seen it happen, over a short period of time, and over a longer one. Not all are healed, and we give this ministry of caring over to God who does the healing, and cares for each of us through risking doing this. We give away what we can and trust God for the result.

The other action we see Jesus performing is that of challenging the disciples to feed the people. Please note that the disciples noticed first that it was late in the day, in an isolated place, and that the crowds must be hungry. They noted the need. That is the first step in ministry. Note the need.

The second step is to bring that need to Jesus. Unsurprisingly, Jesus tells them that they can feed the people.

The third step in ministry is the common reaction to Jesus' challenge. Lord, we don't have enough. Lord, we can't do that because we don't have enough money, we don't have enough resources and in fact we barely have enough for ourselves (in this case, five small loaves and two small fish), not exactly a large meal for twelve, let alone thousands. We are constantly reminded in ministry that we cannot do the ministry Jesus calls us to perform in our own strength. For example, we cannot plant a new congregation if we are worried and consumed with our own survival and needs as a congregation. We cannot hire a youth minister if we are worried that there is not enough money to do so. We cannot run a food bank if we do not have time or energy to buy some food for all those in need. Similarly, we cannot feed those who are starving in East Africa or anywhere around the world, if we do not consider and take action on what our small part might be.

The fourth step in ministry is the offering back of our lack, of our inability. But you can do it, Lord. I offer my small part, and look to you to actually minister and care for others beyond what I can do. Ministry is not about me being a wonderful person. Those who know me well can quickly tell you my faults. Ministry is not about your being a wonderful person, or well educated, or talented in some way, whether it be public speaking or some other gift. No, ministry is offering back to God the fact that we cannot be all that we are called to be, on our own, apart from God, apart from others.

The fifth step in ministry is seeing Jesus do a wonderful work as we offer him back our inability, our lack, our worries, our lack of faith, we offer it back to him and see what he does. And he will often do a miracle, as he did

with the feeding of the five thousand. He will help us help the person next to us who we don't really care about. He will help us feed the poor in the city when we probably won't even talk to those in need on the street. He will help us feed the thousands and millions in East Africa and other parts of the world as we do our small part.

What God doesn't use is when we turn away from him and say all this is too much for me. You noticed that I was talking about ministry. I know I am called the Minister, but really am just the Pastor. I simply keep talking to you who make the difference. I am just one person. We all do the ministry together, face many of the same challenges and so I hope you will go back to this passage in Matthew 14 to note the five steps of ministry. It is a cycle, not a one-time linear thing.

All of us who know the Lord are called to this: quiet and action.
Let us pray.