

## Time out

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Saint John's Episcopal Church, Franklin, Massachusetts, on the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, July 19, 2009.

*When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about the whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was.* Mark 6:54

As news of Jesus' ministry spread rapidly among the people, so did their demands. They sought out Jesus for all manner of help and healing. When Jesus and the disciples move over to the other side of the lake, the crowds are there anxiously awaiting them. Everyone needed something from him and the pressure of all those demands was exhausting. He had become something of a celebrity and because the demand was so great, they had to take time out to renew their strength.

There is something in the nature of being human that we need our heroes. We may not agree on who they are, depending upon our criteria. Rock stars and sports figures are not as much heroes as icons and celebrities. My childhood hero about whom I read a great deal was Charles Lindbergh who was the first to fly solo from New York to Paris in 1927. To be able to see his plane, *The Spirit of St. Louis* at the Smithsonian added to the aura of his story. Another real hero was Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on the moon just forty years ago this week. A more recent heroic figure is Captain Chesley Sullenberger who safely landed his disabled plane in the Hudson River last January. With great skill and experience, he saved the lives of all his passengers and crew on board by keeping his cool and making the right decisions based on his training and discipline.

We all need the opportunity to withdraw to a quiet place to be renewed. I derive great strength from gathering here at the altar each week with you. Here is where we can be still and listen to what God has to say to us through the scriptures. Here is where we can take our needs in prayer. We need regular time alone to renew our reserves to face the work-a-day world. We do whatever is helpful, whether it is meditation or yoga or gardening or reading. I begin each day walking briskly for two to three miles, thinking over the issues and challenges of the day. My alone time later in the day is swimming laps for a half mile. It leaves me thoroughly refreshed with a sense of rebirth as I come up out of the water.

The Christian life is largely giving of our selves to serve others. There are dangers. Those who give of themselves fully and completely need to be objective, lest they get burned out. It can be very demanding when others become dependent on us. If we do not maintain our objectivity, we find little or no time for ourselves. It is important to develop a rhythm of living that allows for time out. Too much activity can be as unproductive as too much idleness. It is important to develop a discipline of listening to our body rhythms to know when we need to slow down and when we need to draw apart for renewal. The better we take care of ourselves, the better we are able to serve others.

Developing rhythms and patterns in our lives is more important than we realize. One of the fascinating things I find in being part of a stage production the patterns of movement we develop on and off the stage. As we make our entrances and exits, our job as members of the cast is to be aware each other's cues so that we coordinate our movements. We keep out of the way of those who are on before us and after us. The rhythm of those patterns is essential to a smooth theatre production. Once again, art imitates life.

Some people see the church as an institution only to be there to serve family occasions such as baptisms, weddings and funerals, known as hatching, matching and dispatching. They see the church existing to serve them with the priest as the head server, expected to be available when the need arises. They have little or no sense of wanting to give anything back to God by serving the church. The church depends upon those who are here week in and week out exercising their own ministries.

God must never be perceived as an errand boy or household servant who is expected to be available when the need arises. I once lived in a huge old rectory built in an era where families had a staff of live-in servants that included a cook, a maid, a butler, a laundress, a gardener, a coachman and a footman. They were there to serve the needs of the family. In our upstairs bedrooms were buttons that were once used to summon the servants. A ring box in the servants' quarters indicated who was calling from which room. I used to push those buttons just to see what happened, but of course no one ever appeared. Alas, the era of a house full of servants is gone forever. We fend for ourselves as our own cook, maid, butler, launderer, gardener and coachman.

Jesus saw the people in the crowds as sheep without a shepherd. They needed guidance and support and protection. We need to be led by a shepherd who knows the dangers that lie ahead. Like sheep, when we are lost without a leader who offers guidance when we go astray and helps us to find our way back.

In the holy land, you can still see shepherds who lead not from the front, but from back of the flock. They can see ahead and drive the herd to their destination. Jesus is our Good Shepherd who defends us from our adversaries by teaching and example. We can't expect to be rescued from those who would harm us, especially when we go against what we know to be right and good.

The heroic nature of Jesus' ministry is that he guides us and warns us about the harm and danger we face every day. He guides us to do the right and most loving thing in each and every situation. He does not save us from ourselves, but teaches and warns of the mistakes to avoid. For those circumstances that are beyond our control, he helps us to bear with them. His whole life was one of serving others, a life never known by those who live only for themselves.

And that, my friends, is the way it is.