

## **Your Secret Place**

July 22, 2012

Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56

*30 The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. 31 Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." 32 So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. 33 But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.*

*53 When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. 54 As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. 55 They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. 56 And wherever he went--into villages, towns or countryside--they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.*

Have you ever had a special place maybe even a secret place? I have. When I was eight, we moved from the city to the farm that my grandfather had bought after he retired. Pappy gave my daddy two acres and gave my uncle Bob two acres. The rest was woods, fields, crops, and pasture land for the cows. All total, there was just a little over eighty-six acres. It was the perfect place for a young boy to grow up. We spend countless days playing in the woods, the fields, the creeks. In the winter, we hunted rabbits, squirrels, quail and dove. I can't think of a more perfect place. If I wanted to be alone, to get away from Nancy, or Jimmy or my cousins, there was a particular tree I could climb and no one could see me. This Formosa tree was along the edge of one of the fields. It was covered in several types of vines. The tree was fairly tall and near the top, there was a place where the vines were so thick, they made a mat. If you worked hard enough, you could actually kind-of shimmy up through the vines and get on top of the mat. Once you did that, you lay down and have a nice comfortable bed where no one else could see you. It was a great place to go to be alone. You could lay up in the vines and look out over the field, or gaze down into the woods. One of the fun things to do, was to lay on my back and look up into the blue sky and imagine all the different animals I could see in the cloud shapes. The farm we grew up on was a special place. My Formosa tree was my special getaway from everyone else, my hiding place, my secret place. My grandfather died and left that farm to my two uncles. Mother died and several years later, Daddy re-married and sold the house and moved back into town with his new wife. In the early 90's my uncles sold the farm to a developer. Now it's a housing development. The woods are gone, there are no more cows or pastures, no more crops are grown; my special place is no more. My Formosa tree where I could hide and be alone is gone. I've gone back several times; the memories are there, but everything else is gone.

Have you ever had a secret place like that? I think most people have. Maybe it was a private place in your house. Or, maybe it was a particular place somewhere around the home where you grew up. Maybe it was a place outside no one else knew about but you. We all need a place where we can go and be alone.

Jesus felt that need too. In our passage today, we find that Jesus calls his disciples to go to a desert place. In fact, that term "desert place" is mentioned three times in just a few verses. The crowds had been pressing on Jesus and the disciples. The workload was heavy. And Jesus felt a need for a break.

Unfortunately for Jesus and the disciples, the crowds followed him and interrupted his mini-vacation. Jesus took the interruptions with a grace and kindness that was characteristic of his life. This passage shows us the popularity of Jesus and the human need confronting him wherever he went. But we also find that theme of the desert place, and we know that occasionally Jesus and the disciples did manage to get away from it all.

I have always been fascinated by the amount of ink the Bible gives to wildernesses and deserts. Have you noticed that? Hagar, Moses and Elijah go to the wilderness and find God. Moses was walking in the wilderness when he came upon a bush that was burning but not consumed. The children of Israel had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years before entering the Promised Land. John the Baptist went into the wilderness to preach, and the crowds followed him there. When Jesus was tempted, he had gone into the wilderness for 40 days. In one of the passages we skipped over this morning, we find Jesus and the disciples feeding the 5,000 in the wilderness, the desert. This "desert place" theme is a prominent one in the Bible. Jesus and the disciples needed a desert place, a hiding place, a secret place. The early Christians were persecuted and very often hid in the desert, the wilderness, to get away from those who were trying to persecute them.

In the same way, we need a hiding place, not so much from the cruelty of the world but from the busyness of the world - a place of solitude, of rest, where distractions are minimized, so we can fix our focus on the larger picture through rest, reflection and prayer.

Today, I want us to think about the need for a "desert place." For me this represents our need for a spiritual break and a vacation for the soul.

We understand that need in some areas of our lives. That's why we take vacations. The summer is the time for vacations and trips and camps. These three months mark a startling contrast to the schedule of the other nine. Having spent 35 plus years in the field of education, I have often thought that the calendar should run from September to August because that is the natural rhythm of our life. The New Year really begins when school starts, and we end our year with the vacations and camps of summer, thus preparing ourselves to return to the routine of the rest of the year.

Several weeks ago, Maggie and I sat down and looked back over our eleven years together. We realized that what we most remembered were the vacations and trips that we took. We talked about our trips to Charleston, WV and our trips to Charleston SC. We talked about a few of the day trips we have taken, and a few of our weekend sojourns. We talked about our trips with Nancy and Gene to the family reunions on my mother's side. We spent a lot of time talking about the weeks we spend with Linnie and Valorie at Cocoa Beach each year. Those vacations and weekend trips seemed to be the markers of our lives. The rest of the year is lived with such a hectic pace that it melts into a blur. But those vacations were special times that we will cherish forever. I think vacations provide a much-needed psychological break as well. You can only keep your nose to the grind so many days out of the year. For good mental health, we occasionally need a break from the routine. Vacations are our "desert place", our secret place in the midst of life.

Most of us are well aware of the need for vacations, and most of us cherish them and take them as often as we can. But have you thought of the need for a special time and a special place, a "desert place," for your spiritual life? You see, this vacation principle applies equally well to our spiritual lives. When Jesus took the disciples to a desert place, he was not just concerned about a vacation. He was concerned about the renewing of their souls.

We live most of our lives running through a spiritual routine just like we do at school or work. But sometimes we need a special break for our spiritual lives, something to stir our spirits and renew our thirst for all things spiritual. And we need to put as much planning and effort into our spiritual vacations, our spiritual "desert place," as we do for our family vacations. We go to great effort to plan our family vacations and we look forward to them for the whole year. We mark the calendar, plan our route, make our reservations, and anticipate the vacation for months in advance. Have you ever thought about giving that much effort in planning your spiritual life? What are you planning and looking forward to for you spirit? Don't you think we need the same kind of attention to our spirit as we give to our bodies?

When Jesus found himself too busy with the demands of his public ministry, he recognized his need for a break. In verse 31 He said to his disciples, **Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.**

Most of you know that I am an avid deer hunter. Well, if you didn't know it, you know it now. A lot of my friends think it's just part of my "redneck side" coming out, and that may be partially true. But there is a much more spiritual side to it. I probably go hunting 25 to 35 times a year. Almost every time I go, I see deer. And the days that I don't see one; well that doesn't make any difference. Every time I go, I commune with God. Every time I go hunting, I take a camera to record some of God's magnificence. I can still watch my clouds. I spend several hours of quiet time in conversation with God. I am alone, I am quiet, I am able to leave the hustle and bustle of everyday life behind. I can go away to a deserted place all by myself and rest awhile. My Formosa tree outside of Charlotte is long gone, but my deer stands are alive and well.

Have you ever considered going to such a "desert place," taking a spiritual vacation, not so much for rest and relaxation as for the renewing of your spirit. Let me make several suggestions and challenge you to find your own "desert place."

- 1) Worship on Sunday
- 2) Daily quiet time
- 3) Prayer Retreat
- 4) Bible course
- 5) Read spiritual books
- 6) Watch spiritual videos

These are just a few suggestions, but the primary issue is finding your own way of turning to a "desert place", finding a secret place for your spirit.

I ask again the question, "What are you doing to nurture your spiritual life?" If your answer is, "Nothing," then it's time for you to find your "desert place."