

**Trinity 6**  
**19<sup>th</sup> July 2009**

**“Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.”**

In many ways, we can be seen as a ‘weary humanity’. Literally and figuratively, we are tired.

A survey conducted by the National Sleep Foundation found that 47 million American adults suffer from sleep deprivation. That’s almost a quarter of their adult population. And just in case we might then feel rather smug, and say ... ‘Well, that’s America isn’t it’... there are comparable figures in our own nation too. That’s a lot of weary people.

And it is a serious problem. Fatigue and exhaustion can have serious consequences. Lack of sleep can affect our physical and mental health.

It can also be deadly. In a recent sample survey here, sixty percent of licensed drivers reported that they drive cars while drowsy. Fatigue has contributed to many road accidents and fatalities.

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Sleep deprivation is a serious problem, and it has a number of causes: from lifestyle choices, to work, to illnesses, to sleeping disorders. The results of surveys throughout the supposedly enlightened societies are clear: many *people*, and here we are talking of *both* adults *and* children, are not getting enough sleep. We are, quite literally, a weary people.

However, we really didn’t need a survey to tell us this. Just ask someone how they are doing these days, and listen to what they say. Have you ever heard people say things like: “I’m exhausted.” “I’m running myself ragged.” “I’m wiped out.” “I’m spent.” “I’m running on empty.” “I just need a nap.” “Lead me to my bed” ... “I need caffeine.” “or, in my case, I need a red wine!”

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People are tired these days and they will tell you so. Many are over-worked, over-committed, over-extended, stretched-thin, stressed-out, burnt-out. Many are too busy, therefore too tired... and they will want to tell you about it. Similarly, it seems like there is some strange competition going on where we try to outdo each other with how busy we are and how tired we get. In a curious way, busyness has become a socially desirable good, a competitive badge of glory to wear whenever we can. Paradoxically it appears that you can't be an example of **real and worthwhile** humanity unless you are always very tired with a 'k'!!!

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The Christian Ethicist Kerby Anderson, in a remarkable and very provoking essay *“Time and Busyness,”* puts it this way, “Being busy is chic and trendy. Pity the poor person who has an ‘organized life’ and a ‘liveable schedule’. Everyone, it seems, is running out of time.” The person who has an ‘organised life’ and ‘work/life balance’ sorted is to be seen as ‘poor’ and ‘to be pitied’...something is not quite right here.

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The pace of modern life has undoubtedly picked up, with keyboards clicking and computers crunching and cell phones chirping their instantaneous messages around the globe. Contradicting the optimistic predictions of sociologists in the 1950s and 60s, these technological feats have not actually led to more leisure time for anyone. Quite the contrary. Most people are busier than ever. The average work-week has increased rather than decreased in the last thirty years, with many executives working 70, 80 sometimes 90 hours per week. ‘Tell me about it’... I can hear from certain quarters of this Cathedral

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I was staggered in Skiathos on holiday recently...as I sat by the pool with a good book, and the odd beer or six. I couldn't help but notice that the same staff seemed to be doing all the jobs... and they did them

all day... from pool cleaning, to waiting on, to electrical maintainance, to brushing up. Being the 'inquisitive', no, nosey person I am, I asked one 'Andrea' in my best Greek what constituted his working life. He said that all the employed staff worked twelve hours per day, seven days per week, without a day off, for six months. He said that they were all single... hardly surprising I thought!  
He then said he went back to his home on the mainland and simply slept... hardly surprising I thought!  
'I look pale and worn out!'...he said.  
Hardly surprising I thought!

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And we are not just physically tired. The Germans have a good word for this other kind of weariness: *weltschmerz*, which means "world weariness."

We are wearied by the stacking up of too many challenges in our lives. In our work lives, people speak of being tired of the rat-race, the daily grind, or climbing the 'corporate ladder'.

In political life, people are tired of broken promises, empty rhetoric, and partisan bickering.

In our personal lives, we are tired of being alone, tired of the routine which can mean that emotional engagement becomes just another 'have to do' with little joy involved.

Some are tired of feeling angry all the time, or feeling afraid all the time, or feeling worthless all the time.

In so many ways we are a tired and weary people.

**"Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."**

In our gospel lesson, Jesus addresses the weariness and busyness of his apostles. We are told that the apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they were doing and all that they were teaching, and, apparently, they were very busy. They were so busy, we are told, that they didn't even have time to eat. So many people were coming and going, that they didn't even have a chance to grab something, even 'on the hoof'.

The modern equivalent would be ... 'Lord, I did grab a smoothie, or a 'Pimms and Pudding' with just one hand, but it fell into the computer keyboard... now I am still hungry... and I can't work either!  
So Jesus' words to them must have felt like cool, refreshing water to people who are thirsty.

He said to them,

**"Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."**

How refreshing this response must be to his weary disciples today. Notice Jesus doesn't respond to the apostles' reports about what they were doing by going over a new strategic plan. Notice he doesn't respond to their reports of what they were teaching by going over a new curriculum; he doesn't respond to their lack of eating time by suggesting to them that they might like to do a 'time and motion' analysis.

No.

He said to his weary apostles,

**"Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."**

Don't we all, at least sometimes, long to hear these words spoken to us by our Lord?

Don't we all desire to hear the invitation to come to a place and simply rest a while in the presence of our gracious God?

A glimpse of such an 'essential' and in no way an 'idealism' is the few minutes we have quiet at the end of Morning Prayer, when the temptation to think about the busyness of the coming day is resisted and we sit and bathe in God's presence.

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After five minutes or so I often find myself in that place which is recreative and simply 'good for the soul'. Perspective begins to return, balance is graspable, and the knowledge of God's supportive love in the mission of the Gospel is an attainable reality.

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This coming week I have a couple of days to extend that ‘coming away’ using the media of quiet times, a couple of good books, and a little sleep here and there... a ‘retreat’ one might call it albeit it short. The Russian term *poustinia* is that for a ‘desert’... and this place is inhabited by the ‘*poustinik*’ the desert dweller... of which we *can* all be one, and perhaps we *should* all be one from time to time.

Of course, our faith requires us to **do** certain things as well as believe certain things. No doubt we are created to find meaning and value in the work we do, especially when it is done to the greater glory of God and the service and up-building of our neighbours.

But our occasional weariness in what we do and our pervasive busyness are signs that something isn’t quite right.

To put it in contemporary terms, our pervasive busyness and weariness are signs of the failed illusion that we are in control of our lives, that we can be self-made men and women. To put it in theological terms, they are signs of the illusion that we can make ourselves right with God through our actions and beliefs. Since these are illusions, we need to keep propping them up. We keep adding one more thing to our to-do list, rather than take some time and reflect on *why* we are doing all these things.

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And rather than see weariness as a sign that something is out of alignment, we take it as a sign that we are making headway. See how busy and weary I am? Doesn’t that mean that I am valuable? Doesn’t that somehow make me worthy of admiration? Doesn’t that merit at least a little divine favour?

When the apostles gathered around Jesus, they told him all that they were doing and all that they were teaching. They were so busy, so many people were coming and going, they didn’t even have time to eat. And Jesus said to them,

**“Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.”**

Our Lord knows what we need, even when we do not. When we gather around him, we may want to tell him all the things we have done and all the things we have taught others. We hold up before him our busyness and our weariness as objects worthy of praise and reward. . . we hold up our self created badge of spiritual honour. We tell him that we have been so busy that we haven't even had time to eat. And we say to ourselves, surely all these things will prove how important and valuable we are.

And our gracious Lord looks past all our illusions and he doesn't even mention them, because if he did, he would have to remind us that all that we are, and all that we do, are gifts from God in the first place. Rather, he looks into our hearts and sees what we truly desire, what we truly need. He makes us lie down in green pastures and leads us beside the still waters and restores our souls. And he says to us,

**“Come away to a place all by yourselves and rest a little while with me.”**