

There is a temptation in the cloistered life to become even more cloistered – a forever retreat from the supposed difficulties of the day and other people. Indeed other people can be seen as the carrier of all these difficulties – avoid them and peace will come at last. I suspect this temptation is general – keep the immigrants at bay for example and all will be well. It's an upper-room mentality and quickly descends into a 'them' and 'us' paranoia, and all those uninvestigated noises outside become fearsome beasts just waiting to tear us apart. And Jesus stands among us and breaks bread and eats fish to bring these two worlds together – the world of all our natural fears and the world as it really is where everything speaks of God. It's incarnation writ large or rather read back into the whole of creation – as a place where God is never not, no need to hide in this upper room anymore, the world is already peopled by God – though, just like the disciples, some know it and some don't or more truly, most of us are a mixture of knowing and not knowing most of the time.

Occasionally we have the privilege of a more immediate experience of Christ, of a sense that something has shifted, that we've experienced the world in a different key and our task then becomes one of working this out, working with this, for the rest of our lives - a leitmotif, to go back to when life itself seems to speak otherwise. But much of this work is done for us not in escaping the supposed difficulties of the day and other people but in encountering them, in going out, in facing our fears. Some of these fears may of course be confirmed but mostly not, and even then a shift will have taken place in oneself, in relation to this world already peopled by God. So the invitation Jesus is making here to his disciples is not a radical break with the world of the past or as they may see it, but a reconnection, a re- discovery of their rootedness in God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who is there for all people and always has been.

The beginnings must needs be small – that first step to investigate and encounter that noise outside, and we all vary in the freedom we have to work away at it, and there may indeed be times for withdrawal, for silence, for rebuilding that essential encounter with the God who forgives us, who makes known his love for us in the solitary combat of the desert, but only to witness further, to stand in the world unafraid and break bread and eat fish with others. It's our sin which is at issue here as much as anyone else's.

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