



Divine Dining

An invitation to feed ourselves from God's Banquet

Week 3

Encountering



Lonely or just alone?

Warm-up question: I want to be alone... Think back to a time when you really enjoyed solitude! It might have been that unforgettable day walking when you forgot the rest of the world existed for a while; it might have been a day when you got to take the phone off the hook and curl up with a favourite book; it might have been the day in a new city when you just got to wander wherever your feet took you!

What made it such a great experience? What would have made it better? How did it end, and how was your experience of human companionship afterwards affected by the experience?

Read: Mark 1:35-37

Discuss

1. Our Scripture this week is short and sweet, and very much to the point; Jesus needed to be alone, so he took himself off "...to a solitary place". How much solitude does your daily or weekly routine allow for you? Too little? Too much? About the right amount? When you do find yourself in solitude is it an experience you enjoy, or a gap which you feel you have to fill?

2a. Think about your experience of silence in prayer or in worship, whether in personal prayer, in small groups or in corporate worship with the wider church. Have you enjoyed the experience? Why do you think this is? In what ways has silence helped you to grow spiritually?

2b. Has the quality of your experience of silence in prayer and worship changed over time? If so, what has made the difference?

3. It has been said that our culture is experiencing an epidemic of loneliness. What do you think is the difference between solitude and loneliness? In what ways have you experienced them differently? Why do you think this is?



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How do we take our God encounter in solitude with us, as we step back into the noise?

4a. In our passage, Jesus is brought back from his place of solitude by his disciples who have been looking for him, and Jesus then immediately identifies the next pressing need: "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." What do you think might be the significance of the juxtaposition of these two elements; the fact that Jesus deliberately seeks solitude, and the magnitude of the needs which press in on him?

4b. Why do you think God encourages us to seek him in solitude, as well as with others? How do you think our journey with God and our encounter with him is enriched by solitude? What do you think would be lost from our spiritual experience if we never looked for time to be truly alone with God? How do you think the experience of seeking God in solitude might affect our faith, our close relationships and our experience of life in community?

Reflect: Slowly read out aloud the passage below, which is the Message version of Matthew 11:28-30.

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

You may want to let this passage lead you as a group into prayer, asking Jesus to lead you into living freely and lightly.

Respond:

Pray for one another – Ask him to make and guard time for you to spend with him alone this Lent.

Ask that God will lead you into a new revelation of his transforming love as you seek him in solitude.