

## **Your Invitation to an overnight retreat**

(Adapted from articles by Ruth Haley Barton and Doug and Marilyn Stewart)  
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Wouldn't it be great if we knew where Jesus lived, so we could go and spend a day with him? He'd welcome us warmly. This is what happened to two early followers of Jesus. Here's the way it went: *"The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means, Teacher), 'where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day."* (Jn. 1:35-39)

In John's Gospel we learn that Jesus chose to "live among us," and he delighted to spend time with people, loving them, listening to them with their needs and questions, and talking with them from his own life of "living with" his Father. Jesus today has no local "home address" among us, yet still we can spend a day with him, talking with him, listening to him and receiving anew his love. In fact, Jesus insists that we cultivate "living with him" day in and day out, "7/24/365." (Jn. 15:5) He's always "at home," and will welcome us. We know his address! His resurrection, ascension and gift of his Spirit make him always available to us, wherever we are. His home among us now is as close and accessible as is our own heart! His "home address" now is in the Father's house, and wonderfully, they also make their home with us! (Jn: 14:23). We can "spend a day with Jesus," much like those two disciples did long ago.

**What is a retreat all about?** It is about spending a day with Jesus. It is about bringing our needs and questions to him, along with our love and gratitude. We allow him to love us through serving us, listening to our questions and fears, spoken and unspoken, and speaking from his heart to ours. A good example of this is the time Jesus spent with his chosen Twelve just before his death, around a table. (See Jn. 13-17). It is about letting him do for us what he died and rose again to do: to show us his love, washing our feet, addressing our fears, reminding us of who he is and what he has for us to do and what he wants us to know, and letting him pray for us. We need his words, his presence and his Spirit's power. We need to be led anew into the heart of the Father and learn more of his love. (Jn. 1:18, 17:26) He loves us and wants to give us his peace and his joy,; he wants to be with us. He calls us "friends" and invites us to become his friends. (Jn. 15:14,15)

**Why do we do it this way?** The reason to set aside a day to come apart is to disconnect and distance ourselves from everything that would distract our attention from our loving Teacher and Lord. We seek solitude so that we can be more attentive to him; we keep silence so that we can listen better to him. We leave behind our place of work and daily life so that we can be with him only. In our "bodily" existence, we are very much dominated by where we are, what we are hearing, and whom we are with. To go apart for a day is to follow Jesus' own example of going off alone. He disconnected from the influence of other stimuli, to be alone with his Father. In reality, we do the same thing for any person we really value and want to connect with. It is a great act of love, to give ourselves undistractedly to another. That's what taking a retreat is all about.

**What can we expect to happen?** He will be present to us and work in us, but how we will be affected or perceive his work can vary greatly. We do know that he loves to come to us in our reflections and meditations, in Scripture, in music, in our prayers, spoken and unspoken, in his creation and in symbols. Sometimes he initiates unexpectedly, as with the two walking to Emmaus; sometimes we initiate and he responds. Sometimes he comes and speaks powerfully and energetically, as at Pentecost; sometimes quietly, peacefully, inwardly, as with Elijah on Mount Sinai. Sometimes the day will be quiet and restful, without profound insights or experiences; other times it can be significant, full of insights and energy. Sometimes there is struggle and sighing, as depths are opened up and hard issues confront us. He knows our needs, and he knows what we can receive. He loves us and knows us by name. We are in his hands. As John could affirm, *“From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known”* (Jn. 1:16-18). He awaits us with his grace.

**“Come to me all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest.” Matt 11:28**

As you prepare for rest tonight, take a few moments to sit quietly before the Lord and reflect on these words from Matthew 11. Read them out loud and hear them right now as God’s invitation to you to enter into much-needed rest tonight. As you sit in the quietness with God, consider:

- In what areas of my life and leadership right now am I weary and needing rest? What challenge feels most weighty? Could I rest from that challenge by trusting it into God’s hands just for today or tonight?
- How does it feel to be invited to rest right now? Do I believe that I am allowed to rest, that it is a good thing—a gift from God—for me so spend these days resting and retreating? Am I willing to allow God to give me rest?

Allow your thoughts and feelings to come to the surface without censoring them. Stay with whatever comes to mind and speak to God about them. You may want to capture in your journal, if that would be helpful.

As you turn out the lights and crawl in bed, imagine that it is God who covers you with the warmth of His love. As you rest into your pillow, do so as an act of trust, knowing that you are resting in God himself. Be assured that God is watching over you and pouring out his love on you as you sleep.

“The Lord gives sleep to those he loves.” Psalm 127:2