

Don't just do something; sit there!

It's often said that Christian faith turns the values and practices of the world on their heads; Jesus' enigmatic comments about the last being first and the first being last are probably the classic expression of this principle at work; but it also applies to our use of time and activity.

Our culture seems to have an attitude to work which is unprecedented in its commitment to busyness and activity and its devotion to filling every moment profitably. A friend recently told me of his experience in a City office in the late 40s. If he was still at his desk after five o'clock his manager would come and ask why he was still there, and whether he was having trouble keeping up with his work. He was expected to go home at five and have what we would now call "A life." It seems to me that it's quite telling that it now requires government legislation to ensure that we maintain an appropriate balance between life and work.

All of which leads me to the main point of this article which is to encourage you to come and have a weekend doing absolutely nothing. We have arranged an Advent retreat at the Emmaus Centre in West Wickham over the weekend 8 to 10 December. The purpose of this is to withdraw from the busyness and to spend some time, consciously with God, doing absolutely nothing. A retreat like this is not for reading; it's not even necessarily for praying, at least not

in a concentrated active sense. It's much more about 'being' than 'doing'. You may wish to read; you will probably wish to spend some time in prayer but none of these things are forced. It may well be that the most important thing for you to do is simply to spend time sitting and staring into space doing nothing; it may be that you simply need to sleep. A retreat is a time for you.

Retreats usually have a 'conductor' who will give a few talks and lead worship and he will also be available for private and personal conversations about your spiritual pilgrimage if you would find it helpful. Our retreat conductor will be Canon Michael Shields. Canon Shields is retired now and lives in Bromley College but he is remembered by most people in the Diocese for his ministry as Vicar of St. John's Sevenoaks. I'm really delighted that he has agreed to come to conduct our retreat as I know him to be a Priest of deep and prayerful spirituality and warm pastoral care.

Do please come on our Advent retreat and take this opportunity. It costs a bit - £80 - but don't let this worry you. If you can't afford it I will find some money to pay for you to go, just speak confidentially to me and we'll work it out. If you'd like to go, come and have a word with me soon.

Michael Camp

**COMMON
GROUND**

There is no
Commonground
message this
month but
Commonground
should return in
November.