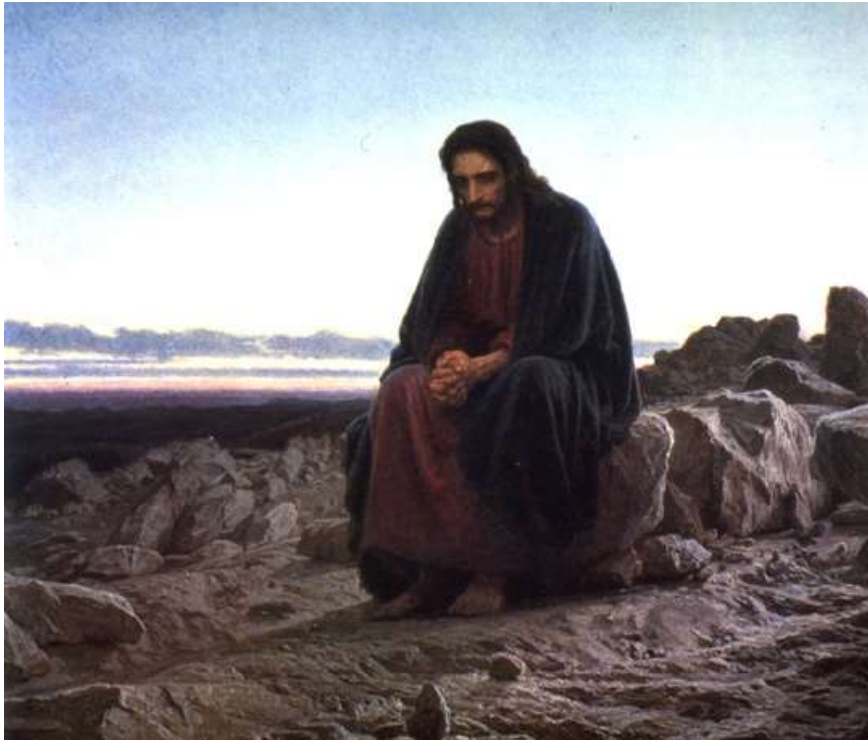


Self-isolation or solitude?



Ivan Kramskoi (1837-1887) – Christ in the Wilderness

It's funny how changing a word can change a concept and maybe even change our mind-set. We are being called upon to "self-isolate"; "isolation" sounds lonely, fearful and scary. We understandably worry for those on their own: how will they cope without human contact?

But use the word "solitude", and immediately it feels more positive. Solitude is something that has been sought-after and valued for centuries. In the monastic tradition, it was a way of distancing ourselves from the distractions of the world in order to focus on the inner life, and our relationship with God. Solitude has led to changed lives and deep insights.

Of course, some of it is about choice and need. If we have control over the time and means of our solitude, it doesn't feel like isolation; and if we don't have pressing needs that only others can meet, we have that choice.

But just maybe we could turn our isolation into solitude. We could treat our enforced absence from human chatter into an opportunity to hear the still, small voice of God. We could let our inability to fill our lives with activity be a blessing that enables us to learn something of stillness and reflection.

Solitude and withdrawal from activity removes our excuses. There is nothing that stops us from spending time with God, in prayer and reading. We can enter into the secret rooms of our lives, and see what we will find, for good or ill. We can learn, and we can grow.

It's significant that Jesus began his ministry with self-isolation in the wilderness. In his chosen solitude he gained strength for the road ahead, and fought significant battles against the temptation to take the easy and popular route to instant success.

May our times of solitude be filled with the presence of angels ministering to us, and be an occasion for our being strengthened for what lies before us in God's service.

Pete Wildman