

No Place in Particular, Just Away, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. x1070408
1 Corinthians 15:19-26 and Luke 24:13-35
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It must have been difficult for the disciples during and after the death of Jesus. They had to keep in hiding because they were all wanted individuals. Imagine the jangled nerves, the high tensions, the talking in whispers, looking around corners, and moving at night. Most of the disciples feared for their lives.

Probably, Saturday was not as bad as Sunday, though. On Saturday, they still had not had the time to get their thinking straight. They were still busy consoling each other. You know what it is like when someone has just lost a wife or husband. Everybody calls when they first hear about it. The bereaved one does all their best to keep good humor, pushing emotions back down, and being very proper. Putting up a good front, is what I call it. The disciples did their best to keep their spirits and front up.

The next day, Sunday, must have been a real letdown. By now, reality was setting in. Jesus was dead. Gone! Thoughts were in real confusion. It was getting to be too much. Furthermore, some women came running back to the group saying that Jesus was gone from the tomb. This was crazy.

Two of the disciples couldn't take it any more. The soldiers were after them, Jesus was dead, and now the women were hallucinating. The two took off. They had to leave town. They headed for Emmaus.

Emmaus wasn't any place in particular. In fact, it was no where. There is nothing important about it. Perhaps there were warm springs there. Maybe the two disciples were going to take a nice hot bath, wash away their problems, and get a fresh start. This would be a sort of reverse baptism! What was important about Emmaus, though, was that it was seven miles away from Jerusalem. Archaeologists aren't sure whether it was east, northeast, or west of Jerusalem. It was just away.

By walking to Emmaus, they were getting away from it all: from soldiers; from crowds; from the scene of the last supper; from the trial; from the place of crucifixion; and from the tomb. Furthermore, they were getting away from all those fickle people. Getting away is fun. We look forward for months in planing our vacations. Then we live the months afterward in memories of a pleasant vacation. Sometimes it's not so important where we are going, or what we're going to do, as it is just to get away; away from the pressures, the job, the house, the school; away from the neighbors, the duties, and the chores; away from the newspapers and world events.

We get away in many other ways than just taking a vacation. We escape from pressures by sleeping, surfing the net, watching TV, boating, hiking, camping. Even a nice home in the suburbs is an escape. But, do you know what is so frustrating? Even when we try to escape the pressures of a job or daily life, we can't really do it. It's nice to be away for a while, but when we come back, the inbox is full of mail and work.

Escapes to Emmaus never really work. Frederick Buechner, in *The Magnificent Defeat*¹ says, "Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go to make ourselves forget that the world holds nothing sacred. Emmaus is where we go, where these two went, to try to forget about Jesus and the great failure of his life." So, these two disciples walked along the road, trying to escape.

¹Fredrick Buechner, *The Magnificent Defeat* © 1966 by Fredrick Buechner, Harper Collins Publishers, New York, NY

Suddenly, they heard the footsteps of someone walking behind them, catching up with them. To them, it was a stranger. The stranger asked them what they were talking about. They thought the stranger was crazy because he didn't know what had happened to Jesus in Jerusalem two days before. How long would it have taken to walk seven miles? Two hours, yet in those two hours the two disciples didn't recognize the stranger.

We cannot, when we live from escape to escape, recognize Jesus and his influence on our lives. There are some factors of living we can't escape from: We must eat. We must rest. The disciples were hungry and tired. They stopped for the night and persuaded the stranger/friend to stay with them. They broke bread together. It was in the breaking of bread that they recognized that the stranger was Jesus.

It is during the real moments of living, not in the escape from daily living, that Jesus comes to us. It is not in the sails of a sailboat, but in the loneliness of an automobile slowed by traffic that Jesus comes to us. It isn't in the call of a referee, but in the call of a friend in need that Jesus comes to us. It isn't even in the sermon, but in the supper that Jesus comes to us.

Now, certainly, there are times and needs for escape. It is a fact that quiet and meditation away from a busy daily life provide us with inspiration and renewal to face daily living. But, that is an escape in order to re-enter reality. Escape for pure escape is useless in trying to find Jesus, ourselves, or meaning in life.

It was in the ordinary breaking of bread with a stranger that Jesus was recognized. The stranger was Jesus. There is a little of Jesus in every stranger. But, as rapidly as Jesus was recognized, he vanished.

That's the way with him, darn it! We have him for a minute. We are sure we have him. We can touch him and feel him. Then, he slips through our fingers.

Jesus can't be nailed down. He can't be nailed down with preconceptions of what he should be like. He can't be nailed down even with iron nails to a cross. He escapes to be what he is: a savior.

Buechner says this:

“The sacred moments, the moments of miracle, are often the everyday moments, the moments which, if we do not look with more than our eyes or listen with more than our ears, reveal only ... a stranger coming down the road behind us, a meal like any other meal. But if we look with our hearts, if we listen with all of our being and our imagination— if we live our lives not from vacation to vacation, from escape to escape, but from the miracle of one instant of our precious lives to the miracle of the next— what we see is Jesus himself, what we may hear is the first faint sound of a voice somewhere deep within us saying that there is a purpose in this life, in our lives, whether we can understand it completely or not; and that this purpose follows behind us through all our doubting and being afraid, through all our indifference and boredom, to a moment when suddenly we know for sure that everything does make sense because everything is in the hands of God, one of whose names is forgiveness, another is love. This is what the stories about Jesus' coming back to life mean, because Jesus was the love of God, alive among us, and not all the cruelty and blindness of humans could kill him.”²

Happy Easter!

²Ibid.