

**1 Kings 2:10-12: 3:3-14**  
**Ephesians 5:15-20**  
***“The Best Day Ever”***

August 19, 2018  
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It's good to be back with you this morning. I was away the last two Sundays on vacation in Disney World. I missed you though, and being back with you today, it's the best day ever.

No! Come on! I was in Disney World last week! The place where, when you drive in, the sign overhead reads, “Where wishes come true.” That's hard to beat. It's hard to beat a walk-through the Magic Kingdom, and my children sitting in the front row on Splash Mountain, plunging 50 feet into a pool of water and literally screaming, “This is the best day ever.” It's hard to beat being away on vacation.

By definition, Merriam Webster's dictionary says a vacation is “a scheduled period in which normal activities are suspended; a rest.” But we've also heard it called simply, a checking out, a getting away.

It's good to check-out and get away from time-to-time. It's also good to remind ourselves that we don't always need to go far away for an entire week to get that much needed break. Sometimes an afternoon or evening out on the boat is enough to re-charge our batteries. Or an early morning walk in the woods, or sitting in the tall grass with a friend, who may or may not just be a dog, is enough food for the soul. But if I've heard it once, I've heard it a thousand times: someone has reached the end of their rope; work is never ending; the house is never clean; the kids have been operating at an unusually high level of annoying for over 3 years now; they feel like they're about to snap, and someone tells them, “Maybe you just need to get away.”

I knew a widow who said this once. After his wife died, he came home to find that the place felt empty. He knew it would. He just didn't bank on the feeling not going away. Friends encouraged him to join a community group, take up a new hobby, make your way through that stack of books you've been piling up all these years. Eventually he said, “Maybe I just need to get away.” He went away for a couple weeks, came back home, the feeling was still there. The next Sunday in church he told me, “I'm thinking about moving.”

“Okay,” I said, “if you think it will help.” A year passed and he was still in church. I said to him, “I thought you were moving.”

“I was going to, but a few months ago I ran into a friend at the coffee shop. We sat down and started talking. It was nice. We do that every couple of weeks now, and I would miss it if I moved.”

Sometimes, we can go searching the whole world over for that perfect vacation spot, only to discover that what gives us back to ourselves is that unexpected rendezvous with a friend in a coffee shop right in our own town.

The poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote:

“Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God,  
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;  
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries.”

Browning is talking about that story from Exodus where Moses sees a great light shining on a far-off mountainside. Intrigued, Moses leaves behind what he is doing and hikes the mountain to see where the light is coming from and he discovers it's a bush that is on fire but is not burning up. “How can this be?” asks Moses. Moses doesn't ask why the bush is burning. He already knows why it's burning. It's made of wood and it's on fire. Naturally, it's going to burn. It's going to burn until it's all burned up and then the fire will go out. What Moses wants to know though is, how is not burning up? What's keeping this strange combination of fire and wood going? In the natural world, these two things should not be able to co-exist. Yet they do. How is that possible? The answer of course is that it's super-natural. It's God. And Moses takes off his shoes. Because that's what you do in order to get closer to something. You strip down. You remove everything that stands between you and whatever it is that you're trying to get a hold of.

It's not at all unlike what we do when we go on vacation. We strip off the work clothes, we leave the mail for someone else to pick up, we turn off the computer and cell phone (some even go so far as to leave them at home), and we go off in search of something that can't be found by staying where we are. We leave our natural surroundings to go off in search of the super-natural.

If you know anything about the story of Moses though, you know that once the vacation is over, Moses has to go back home. Back to Egypt. Back to where life and living are hard. Back to where the boss is still in charge and the slaves must work to stay alive.

I know, believe me, I know. I was in Disney World last week and now look at me. And you know, summer is almost over. Soon you'll have to close up the beach house for another season, put the boat on the trailer, start wearing shoes with laces again, and go back to work and school. It sucks. When God told Moses to go back to Egypt, Moses told God he didn't want to go. And God said, "Well you can't stay here." So, like all of us, Moses went.

Now what's he going to do when he gets there? Spend all day thinking about how he wants to be someplace else, doing something else? I think it's true that we tend to think of ourselves as living in a world of dualities. We have the places where we see ourselves as working, and we have the places where we go to rest and be on vacation. And this gets played out in more ways than we realize. We have the rich and the poor; the educated and uneducated; the good section of town and the bad section of town; pink and blue baby blankets; the able and the disabled. We have moved to becoming a country in which only two political parties really count.

Jesus himself lived in this same world, a world in which people thought there were only two available options: this world, the one we're stuck living in now, and a heaven someplace else. This world and all its forms is but a place of decay, where we are slaves bound to work, work, work with no satisfaction ever guaranteed. Heaven on the other hand is a place of peace and wholeness, but it is far beyond our reach, and our chances of ever getting there are slim to none. Then along comes Jesus, with a revolutionary word to preach: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." It changes everything because suddenly everything is ripe with possibility. If heaven is at hand, if God is on the scene, then justice for the poor is not something we have to wait for; the rich can be generous today; soldiers can march home today; there is no other world someplace else for which we must wait before our children can live in safety and hope. Heaven is at hand, let love be our unending song.

This is the message Paul is trying to get through to the church at Ephesus. Annie read it for us: "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the

most of the time. Because the days are evil.” Yes, we...have...problems. But don’t be foolish. Don’t stick your head in the sand, don’t tell yourself that all is headed to hell in a handbasket anyway and you might as well just stay home and drink yourself drunk. Don’t numb your mind, don’t harden your heart, don’t check out of this world, for heaven is at hand! Every bush is on fire with God!

Still, it’s easier said than done. Disney World is a pretty nice place to be. I almost could have stayed there. You can buy ice cream cones on every corner and get hugs from Winne-the-Pooh. You can stroll through Fantasyland and almost forget it’s not real. That the real world isn’t fantasy. It’s India, where more than 300 people were killed this weekend by monsoons. It’s Sudan with its thousands of refugees. It’s border disputes and immigration crises and gun violence in schools and sex-abusing priests and churches not always doing what is right. But it’s also neighbors opening their doors to refugees, and teenagers speaking up for sensible gun laws. It’s Moses heading back to Egypt and you heading off to the food pantry with your jars of peanut butter and boxes of Cheerios, and you being that village to raise our children in, and you giving comfort in death and hope in life, and you daring to pray those same immortal words week after week after week: “Our Father, who art in heaven, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Still, it is so much easier said than done. Our own lives are so painfully busy. Our schedules so full. Even our vacations exhaust us. As some of you said to me before I left to go to Disney, “You’re going to come back and need a vacation from your vacation.” Even when the work is good, the last thing we need sometimes is more of it.

I’m reminded of what African-American slaves used to do when working out in the fields, out under that hot southern sun from sun-up to sun-down. Hardly a moment to rest; the master always standing over them barking orders, threatening punishment. The world must have felt like a trap from which one could never be free. How to make it through another day; to not forget that the world and you actually belong to God; that despite the way things look sometimes, even now God is making out of this old world a new world. And so the slaves would sing songs about heaven—freedom songs. “Swing low, sweet chariot, comin’ for to carry me home.” “Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen, nobody knows my sorrow. Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen, nobody but Jesus.”

But sometimes it was just a word, one word: [*singing*] "A----amen. [*Let me hear you now*] A----amen. [*Sing it louder now*] A----amen, amen, amen. [*One more time with me*] A----amen. A----amen. A----amen, amen, amen."