

"A DREAM VACATION"

YOU PROBABLY DON'T NEED A LOT MORE TO GET YOUR MIND IN GEAR THAN A TITLE LIKE "A DREAM VACATION" – ESPECIALLY AT THE BEGINNING OF SUMMER.

I IMAGINE YOU HAVE YOUR OWN THOUGHTS ABOUT WHAT WOULD CONSTITUTE "A DREAM VACATION."

IT MAY BE A PARTICULAR DESTINATION – SOMEWHERE YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO TRAVEL.

MAYBE IT'S SOMEWHERE YOU'VE ALREADY BEEN – A PLACE TO WHICH YOU LONG TO RETURN.

A DREAM VACATION CAN CHANGE, OF COURSE, DEPENDING ON YOUR AGE & YOUR SITUATION IN LIFE.

I REMEMBER A DREAM VACATION I TOOK WHEN I WAS IN MY EARLY 20'S.

WE CALLED IT A "SPORTS VACATION."

I TRAVELED WITH A COUPLE FRIENDS FROM DETROIT TO CANTON, OHIO AND VISITED THE PRO FOOTBALL HALL OF FAME.

FROM THERE, WE WENT TO PITTSBURGH & TOOK IN A PIRATE BASEBALL GAME.

OUR NEXT DESTINATION HAD REALLY DETERMINED THE TIMING OF THE TRIP.

WE WENT TO THE TRAVERS STAKES – THE OLDEST THOROUGHBRED HORSE RACE IN AMERICA - AT THE SARATOGA RACE COURSE IN NEW YORK.

THEN IT WAS ON TO TORONTO & THE HOCKEY HALL OF FAME & THEN BACK HOME TO SOUTHEASTERN MICHIGAN.

AT THAT STAGE IN MY LIFE, THAT WAS A DREAM VACATION.

THEN, FOR MANY YEARS, DOING ANYTHING – GOING ANYWHERE WITH THE FAMILY – BECAME A DREAM VACATION.

I'M NOT FAR RIGHT NOW FROM THINKING OF A DREAM VACATION AS SOMEWHERE QUIET & SECLUDED WHERE I CAN SPEND HOURS A DAY READING.

EVEN THINKING ABOUT A DREAM VACATION CAN BE FUN, CAN'T IT?

IN THIS PASSAGE WE'VE READ FROM GALATIANS, PAUL GIVES US A GLIMPSE OF A VACATION HE EXPERIENCED ONCE.

BY ANY ESTIMATION, IT SURELY WOULD HAVE BEEN "A DREAM VACATION."

MORE THAN LIKELY, THIS IS THE EARLIEST OF PAUL'S LETTERS.

FROM THE OUTSET, HE APPEARS TO BE PRETTY WORKED UP AS HE WRITES – AS WELL HE SHOULD BE.

HE HAS ESTABLISHED THIS CHURCH IN THE REGION OF GALATIA & NOW THAT HE'S GONE, THERE ARE OTHERS WHO HAVE COME IN & TAKEN PEOPLE IN A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT DIRECTION FROM WHERE THEY WERE UNDER PAUL'S LEADERSHIP.

THESE NEW LEADERS HAVE, IN ESSENCE, UNDERMINED ALL HIS WORK THERE.

QUITE NATURALLY, PAUL IS INCENSED AS WELL AS HEARTBROKEN.

AS HE WRITES THIS LETTER, HE FACES A DILEMMA.

HE'S STUCK IN A NO-WIN POSITION.

HE'S BEING ATTACKED FROM OPPOSITE SIDES.

THERE'S THE CONSERVATIVE FACTION – THE JUDAIZERS AS THEY WERE CALLED – WHO THOUGHT PAUL WAS WATERING DOWN THE FAITH BY ACCEPTING THOSE WHO DIDN'T ADHERE TO THE RESTRICTIONS OF ALL THE OLD TESTAMENT LAWS.

ON THE OTHER SIDE ARE THE LIBERALS – THOSE WHO CLAIM THAT PAUL WAS LITTLE MORE THAN A MOUTHPIECE FOR THE APOSTLES IN JERUSALEM.

SO PAUL HAS TO WALK A FINE LINE HERE BETWEEN THOSE ON OPPOSING THEOLOGICAL SIDES.

THINGS HAVEN'T CHANGED MUCH IN 2,000 YEARS, HAVE THEY?

THOUGH THE ISSUES MAY HAVE CHANGED & THE THEOLOGICAL HOT BUTTONS MAY BE DIFFERENT, THOSE WIDE-RANGING, OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS STILL EXIST, DON'T THEY?

AND IT'S NO EASIER TODAY TO MAKE YOUR WAY THROUGH THAT MINEFIELD THAN IT WAS THEN.

PAUL'S APPROACH IS STILL THE BEST ONE.

HE PREACHES CHRIST.

THAT'S IT.

HE TELLS THOSE ON THE LIBERAL SIDE THAT HE ISN'T A MERE MOUTHPIECE FOR THE ORIGINAL 12 APOSTLES.

HE TELLS THE CONSERVATIVE SIDE THAT HE'S SPENT TIME WITH PETER AND, IN ESSENCE, HIS MESSAGE IS THE SAME MESSAGE AS THE ONE BEING PROCLAIMED FROM THE MOTHER CHURCH IN JERUSALEM.

HIS MESSAGE IS CHRIST.

AND THIS BRINGS US TO PAUL'S DREAM VACATION.

HE SAYS THAT HE SPENT 2 WEEKS WITH PETER.

THAT STATEMENT FASCINATES ME.

I THINK IT COULD BE TURNED INTO A MARVELOUS NOVEL OR PLAY OR MOVIE.

SOME OF YOU MAY REMEMBER THE VERY ODD MOVIE "MY DINNER WITH ANDRE" – NEARLY 2 HOURS OF TWO GUYS SITTING IN A RESTAURANT HAVING A CONVERSATION.

THAT'S IT!

YOU SEE OTHER DINERS & OCCASIONALLY HEAR THE WAITER SAY SOMETHING, BUT THE MOVIE IS PRIMARILY THE CONVERSATION THAT TAKES PLACE BETWEEN WALLY & ANDRE.

EVEN MORE BIZARRE, THE CHARACTERS – WALLY SHAWN & ANDRE GREGORY ARE PLAYED BY WALLACE SHAWN & ANDRE GREGORY!

SOMETIMES THE CONVERSATIONS THAT TAKE PLACE BETWEEN 2 PEOPLE CAN BE INCREDIBLY FASCINATING!

MAYBE YOU'VE DISCOVERED THAT IN SOME OF YOUR OWN CONVERSATIONS.

YOU MAY HAVE WONDERFUL MEMORIES OF CONVERSATIONS IN WHICH YOU HAVE PARTICIPATED OVER THE YEARS.

I DON'T THINK YOU CAN MANUFACTURE THAT KIND OF CONVERSATION VERY EASILY.

BUT YOU CAN BE OPEN TO THE POSSIBILITY.

YOU CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OPPORTUNITIES TO BE IN CONVERSATION WITH SOMEONE FROM WHOM YOU MIGHT LEARN & GROW TOGETHER.

PERHAPS ONE REASON I'M SO TAKEN BY THIS PASSAGE IN GALATIANS IS BECAUSE I LOVE THE IDEA OF THE ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATION THAT TAKES PLACE BETWEEN PETER & PAUL.

IF YOU'VE HAD THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING WITH ME IN A SMALL GROUP SETTING, YOU KNOW I'M NOT WHAT ONE WOULD CALL A "STERLING CONVERSATIONALIST!"

A ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATION I CAN HANDLE, BUT MORE THAN THAT AND I FREEZE UP.

I THINK THAT'S WHAT I LOVE ABOUT THIS "DREAM VACATION" THAT PAUL EXPERIENCED.

IT WASN'T A MATTER OF PAUL SPENDING TWO WEEKS WITH ALL 12 DISCIPLES – OR EVEN 3 OR 4 OF THEM! OH, JAMES APPARENTLY STOPPED IN A TIME OR TWO, BUT OTHER THAN THAT, IT WAS JUST PAUL & PETER.

CAN YOU IMAGINE WHAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE TO TAG ALONG & LISTEN IN?

WHAT WOULD PAUL HAVE WANTED TO ASK PETER?

REMEMBER – AS HE TELLS US IN THIS PASSAGE – AFTER HIS DAMASCUS ROAD CONVERSION EXPERIENCE, HE SPENT 3 YEARS ON HIS OWN.

THERE'S ANOTHER BOOK, PLAY OR MOVIE IN THAT!

WHAT HE DID DURING THAT PERIOD OF TIME IS OPEN TO CONJECTURE & THERE'S BEEN PLENTY OF IT OVER THE AGES.

BUT WHEN HE MEETS WITH PETER IN JERUSALEM, IT'S APPARENTLY HIS FIRST OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR – FIRSTHAND – FROM THOSE WHO WERE THERE WHEN JESUS WAS ALIVE.

WHAT, I WONDER, DID PAUL ASK HIM IN THE COURSE OF THEIR TIME TOGETHER?

DID THEY TRAVEL THE CITY & VISIT SOME OF THE SITES WHERE CRUCIAL EVENTS TOOK PLACE?

CAN YOU IMAGINE PETER POINTING TO A COURTYARD & SAYING, "*PAUL, IT WAS RIGHT OVER THERE THAT I WAS STANDING WHEN THE ROOSTER CROWED & I REALIZED THE WORDS OF JESUS HAD COME TRUE – THAT I WOULD DENY HIM THREE TIMES.*"

CAN YOU IMAGINE HIM TAKING PAUL TO THE TOMB WHERE JESUS HAD BEEN LAID & TELLING HIM THE EVENTS OF THAT FIRST RESURRECTION MORNING?

MAYBE PAUL ASKED HIM WHAT IT FELT LIKE WHEN HE FIRST LAID EYES ON JESUS ALONG THE SHORE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE.

PERHAPS PAUL WANTED TO KNOW WHAT IT WAS LIKE WHEN PETER, JAMES & JOHN WERE WITH JESUS AT THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION – "*COULD YOU REALLY SEE MOSES & ELIJAH STANDING WITH JESUS?*"

OR MAYBE HE WANTED TO ASK HIM ABOUT THE DAY OF PENTECOST – “WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO STAND UP & SPEAK AS YOU DID TO ALL WHO WERE GATHERED THERE?”

YES, THIS WOULD SURELY HAVE BEEN A “DREAM VACATION” FOR PAUL.

WHAT MORE COULD YOU ASK TO EXPERIENCE IN A TWO-WEEK GETAWAY THAN THIS!

YOU WON’T HAVE SUCH AN OPPORTUNITY THIS SUMMER ON YOUR OWN VACATION.

OR....MAYBE YOU WILL.

MAYBE YOU’LL FIND YOURSELF SOMETIME OVER THE COURSE OF THE NEXT 3 MONTHS ENGAGED IN A CONVERSATION THAT IS EVERY BIT AS ENLIGHTENING & UPLIFTING AS THAT WHICH TOOK PLACE BETWEEN THESE TWO GIANTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH.

DON’T DISCOUNT THE POSSIBILITY.

AS I HAVE CONSIDERED THE LAST FEW SUNDAYS IN WORSHIP, IT ALMOST FEELS LIKE THIS IS THE THIRD IN A SERIES.

THAT SOMETIMES HAPPENS UNINTENTIONALLY.

TWO WEEKS AGO, WHEN WE CELEBRATED PENTECOST, WE FOCUSED ON LISTENING TO ONE ANOTHER – LISTENING TO THE DIFFERENT LANGUAGES WE SPEAK – LISTENING TO THOSE WHOSE VIEWPOINT MAY DIFFER FROM OUR OWN.

LAST SUNDAY, ON TRINITY SUNDAY, WE TALKED ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FATHER, SON & HOLY SPIRIT & HOW THAT RELATIONSHIP CAN SERVE AS A MODEL FOR THE RELATIONSHIPS WE’RE CALLED TO SHARE WITH ONE ANOTHER.

AND HERE TODAY, AS WE CONSIDER THIS PASSAGE FROM GALATIANS, WE’RE LOOKING AT RELATIONSHIPS ONCE AGAIN.

ISN’T THAT REALLY WHAT LIFE IS ALL ABOUT?

NO MATTER WHAT THE SITUATION IS, LIFE IS CENTERED ON RELATIONSHIPS.

CHRIST HAS CALLED US INTO HEALTHY, UPLIFTING, GROWING, LOVING RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER & WITH THE WORLD.

AS WE CONSIDER “DREAM VACATIONS” AND AS WE CONNECT THAT TO OUR RELATIONSHIPS, MAYBE WE COULD GIVE THOUGHT TO TAKING A VACATION FROM SOME THINGS.

MAYBE THAT’S WHERE “A DREAM VACATION” COULD HAVE ITS DEEPEST IMPACT ON US.

WHY NOT TAKE A VACATION FROM HARSH WORDS & JUDGMENTAL ACTIONS.

WHY NOT TAKE A VACATION FROM UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS & CONDESCENDING ATTITUDES.

WHY NOT TAKE A VACATION FROM A CLOSED MIND & A SELF-RIGHTEOUS SPIRIT.

I THINK YOU MAY FIND THAT IF YOU *DO* TAKE SUCH A VACATION, IT WILL BE ONE FROM WHICH YOU WON’T WANT TO RETURN.

YOU MAY FIND IT BRINGS YOU SO MUCH PEACE & JOY, HAPPINESS & FULFILLMENT, THAT YOU WON’T WANT TO GO BACK TO YOUR FORMER LIFE.

IN ADDITION TO TAKING A VACATION *FROM* SOME THINGS, WHY NOT MAKE VACATION PLANS *TO*
SOMEWHERE - SOMEWHERE YOU'VE NEVER BEEN.

MAKE PLANS TO SPEND SOME TIME IN OPEN & HONEST CONVERSATION WITH SOMEONE WHOSE VIEWS
ABOUT LIFE & THE WORLD ARE A BIT DIFFERENT FROM YOUR OWN.

GO TO PLACES IN OUR OWN COMMUNITY YOU'VE NEVER BEEN BEFORE.

PARTICIPATE IN A PROGRAM OR MISSION ENDEAVOR OF OUR CHURCH THAT YOU'VE NEVER EVEN
CONSIDERED BEFORE.

THIS SUMMER, TRY SOMETHING NEW.

TRY GROWING IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS.

YOU MAY FIND, WHETHER YOU KNEW IT OR NOT, THAT THE EXPERIENCE WAS REALLY -ALL ALONG -
YOUR DREAM VACATION. AMEN.

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