

Column – Hitting the open road with God

“Never get so busy making a living that you forget to make a life,” a wise person has said. One way of doing the latter is travelling. Travelling opens new vistas and clears away cobwebs from a person’s mind.

This past year was a wash for venturing far from home because of Covid. How thankful we can be that most restrictions have been lifted and hopefully those still in place will soon be.

Going on vacation was a big deal when I was growing up, and I am sure that remains true for today’s youngsters. I can feel the excitement of loading our Mercury Colony Park station wagon, not just with suitcases, but with a zinc-lined cooler, a water jug and split-oak basket with picnic supplies . . . all for use at midday meals at roadside tables.

Taking a vacation from the everyday mill of life is good and invigorating. Even so, there should be no vacation from God or His Church. Four reasons come to mind.

The first is that worshipping God every Sunday along with other believers is taught in scripture. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews warns his first century readers against staying away from their meetings. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (10:25), he writes.

"Seven days without prayer makes one weak," read an outdoor church sign. A lousy pun – definitely – yet the sentiment is true. The God-ordained rhythm of worship and work keeps us spiritually fit and enables us (in the words of the Book of Common Prayer) "to manfully fight under Christ's banner against sin, the world, and the devil."

A second reason is that attending public worship was Jesus’ way. In Luke's Gospel we read: "And He came to Nazareth where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day."

No doubt, Mary and Joseph had instilled this practice into Him at an early age, and it stuck. Parents today would do well to follow the lead of the Holy Family.

A third reason is showing up for worship sends out a message to the world, a message that you belong to Jesus and are a part of the new age He inaugurated. It is an act of witness.

Jesus rising on that first Easter morning -- the first day of the week -- was more than a great one-of miracle: it was a sign that the Sabbath rest spoken of in Genesis 2:2 was over. God's new week of creation had begun.

By coming together, Christians announce to the world that they are part of that new creation. Paul alludes to this new status when he writes: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Greek is more terse still: "In Christ . . . new creation."

The fourth and final reason is more winsome and pragmatic: you meet the nicest people and are reminded that this thing we call Church is much bigger than your own parish patch. It is a world-wide family and includes people of every race and place.

Following a service at St. Martin-in-the-Fields on Trafalgar Square in London, as tea and biscuits were served on the portico out front, an older lady took time to tell me the story of Edith Cavell. Miss Cavell was a British nurse executed by the Germans in 1915 in occupied Belgium during the First World War. A monument to her bravery and Christian faith stands in the middle of the street just outside St. Martin-in-the-Fields. Inscribed on it are some of her last words: "Patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone."

I learned all this and more from being in the Lord's house, on the Lord's Day, and with one of the Lord's people . . . while on vacation. Isn't it grand to be a Christian?

O GOD, who makest us glad with the weekly remembrance of the glorious resurrection of thy Son our Lord; Vouchsafe us this day such blessing through our worship of thee, that the days to come may be spent in thy service; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.