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Alexandria, VA 22310
May 8, 2011 – Mother’s Day

Acts 2:14a; 36–41
Luke 24:13–35

GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL

The Gospel of Luke is full of stories about Jesus joining his disciples incognito. Their world has changed, and they are having a hard time keeping up. The followers of Jesus have been promised that He would redeem Israel. But instead of experiencing liberation, they are crestfallen. They are crushed. They are grief stricken. They aren’t feeling hope. They are feeling confusion.

These things are not helped; they are just made all the worse by the stories from Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary, mother of James. There are no good answers to all the discussions and questions Cleopas has had with the other eleven and with his companions. You can almost feel their restlessness.

How many times have we said with no one in particular listening, “I need a break. I need to get away just for a little while.” I don’t know about you, but I am fairly sure that these devices (phones)—especially the ones we call smart—are not helping us get away. They are not providing the promised breaks from pressure. But you see, in order to get away, you have to turn them off.

I wonder sometimes if we ever turn off—if we are always so engaged, always solving problems, answering questions. I wonder if we are experiencing any real understanding in the tempest of activities where we find ourselves at all hours of the day. I’m amazed at the time span of some of the communications I get.

We have a chance this Thursday—an opportunity to join these two disciples from confusion to clarity. I hope you’ve digested it, re-read your TEMPO. I hope Thursday night is on your radar. But if it’s not, let me invite you to join many here this Thursday night at 7:30. I believe we will share a time of retelling of our own story. I believe we’ll pause if ever so briefly to share our experiences with a stranger from upstate New York who is a trained facilitator. Someone who will help us over the next few weeks, or possible months—assess how we are responding to worship and admission to God’s call. A stranger who will walk with us on our journey of faith. Maybe we need to be more like the people in this story. Maybe we need to admit that we just need a moment to get away. We want Jesus to fix our understanding. We value our faith in part because Christ has promised to fix what is wrong in our lives—to be with us in those struggles that we all share.

Maybe on this May 8—this Mothers’ Day, this third Sunday after the resurrection—maybe that’s part of our problem—our confusion. We want faith and church and life to be easier to understand. And if, as we say, forgiveness and reconciliation are the an-

swers , why are so many of us confused? What will it take for us to make the connection between the life of Jesus and our lives? When will God's promises of healing really take hold. When will they overcome our disappointment, even in some cases that are most confusing for our emotions, our anger?

It's time to step back—to get away, to take a break and do some listening. I think the reason we stop listening (and we do sometimes ... you know how it works)—we stop listening, stop communicating. I think we do that when our minds are made up. How does Jesus put it? “Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe.” You've already decided what my life meant. You've dismissed it as being a failure, when in truth, it's fulfillment.

If you and I want to be Easter people; if we genuinely want to experience the significance of Jesus death and resurrection, Luke says we have to listen to that spirit in one another and to listen to that spirit as we break bread together. Either right before or right after we stop listening to each other, we stop braking bread with one another. We take our meals apart from one another.

Long before the very successful raid in Pakistan last week, long before the surge of soldiers, long before the shift of focus of our war efforts, in 2002 a writer from Scotland named Rory Stewart walked across Afghanistan. I don't know about you but if I was going to cross Afghanistan I would want the fastest, most heavily armed vehicle I could secure. But this Scottish writer chronicled his journey in a book, maybe you've read it: *Places in Between*. In it he talks about walking across this land. And he offers us some tidbits for our own journeys.

First, he says if you find you are in a Muslim nation and you find it is imperative that you pretend to be a Muslim, claim that you are from Indonesia for it is a well-known Muslim nation which few Muslims know anything about. And as you're making your way along the open land and you come to a field where you see no evidence of sheep (no sheep droppings), it is most likely a field that is mined and you may want to avoid it. And if you are planning to take your donkey into the high altitudes, first have his nostrils surgically enlarged to allow greater oxygen flow. Now that makes sense. And by the way, as you travel from one place to the next, do NOT carry detailed maps, for doing so tells everyone that you are probably a foreign spy.

I share these tidbits with you not only because it's in the book, but clearly Rory Stewart has taken the time to break bread and listen to those people he encounters walking across Afghanistan. He tells how he met villages full of people who lived completely without electricity—people who knew nothing of the modern world, people who had never experienced any formal education. He talked about meeting health professionals with the ease we use to carry briefcases. He met people who had not moved more than five kilometers from their place of birth in forty years.

You see, when we walk from confusion of thoughts to clarity, we do so by simply listening and by sharing biblical hospitality: breaking bread, table fellowship. And when we

do, when we stop long enough for those common place activities to occur, I believe Christ still promises to make His words burn within our hearts. We'll see you Thursday, I hope.