



## Places I've Been

Since the day I snuck into my dad's office, pulled his well-worn black box camera off the shelf and shot a photo of my mom's backyard laundry drying rack, I've been fascinated by photography.

Sixty-seven years and countless darkroom hours later, I still have that image (digitized)—and the camera that shot it. I also have several thousand more photos. Most of these images (not to mention the photos and movies inherited from my parents) are places I've been.

Whether you used a Kodak Brownie, Instamatic, Polaroid, Canon, Nikon, Hasselblad or smartphone—whether you voyaged to the far east or drove to a nearby park—you doubtless have more than a few photos of your journeys.

As I revisit my father's old movies, I see my young self delighting to be on road trips across the country—and there were many of them. An elementary school teacher (who prepared my lessons to take on the road) told my parents I might learn more from travel than I would in her classroom.

Later in life I took my own family to far-away places, and I continue to do so a few times a year—usually mixing profession with pleasure. I've joined international groups of artists and journalists, made hundreds of friends, and gained a more holistic perspective of our world. I've often been reminded that my locale and my nation is not the center of the universe. That is, until last year, when physical travel came to a screeching halt. Now my travel consists of walking to my living room and meeting on email or Zoom.

I'm not alone in my frustration. Travel is so important to many Americans that they get antsy when they can't. At the height of the pandemic, a survey by American Express reported that nearly half of respondents felt anxious because they couldn't travel.

Even as our pandemic eases, travel in the future is likely to be far different. Those of us at higher risk will think twice about herding into an aluminum tube crammed with hundreds of

people hurtling through the stratosphere for hours on end. Besides, companies have discovered that most business meetings can be done cheaply online—and technologies are rapidly improving.

But this change could be a good thing. Despite the huge benefits of travel, the escapist downside is that we can neglect our home, our communities, our family and ourselves. Our pandemic has been a pointed reminder that we desperately need to address burning issues at home—some of which have been shamefully neglected for decades.

Likewise, this Lenten and Easter season compels us to take time from running to and fro—to come back home to Christ—to relax with him for a while and contemplate where we've been, where we are headed and where he would have us travel.

It's kind of the spiritual equivalent of flipping through old photos and pondering the places you've been—the joys along with the hardships, disruptions, illnesses, dangers and calamities you've faced. Maybe a few of those journeys were places you didn't want to go.

Yet Jesus offers us the grace and freedom to choose our path as we follow his way. It's a bit of a paradox—his way is at once the narrow road (Matthew 7:13) and the way of freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17). Narrow, because so few really find the full freedom of traveling the way of Jesus. Free, because we travel with full confidence that we will reach our destination. It's unlike the physical journeys we carefully plan for ourselves with tight schedules, itineraries and reservations. By contrast, in our spiritual journey along the Jesus way, one never knows exactly what might be around the bend or over the hill.

Our friend Jesus does, and I think he's probably keeping some kind of photographic record of the whole thing—well, the good parts anyway. We can review them with him when it's all over. Wait—what am I saying? We can review them with him *any* time. □

—Monte Wolverton