

## Running Away

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*Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money[a] to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." Matthew 19:21*

My friend Kay is normally a very easy going, roll-with-the-punches, kind of person. But lately, it seems that everything in her life is going the wrong direction and as she says. "I've had it. Go away world! I've had it with you!"

I know that Kay is not alone. For many of us, it feels as if the natural world has converged on us to bombard us with unexpected situations. First it was murder hornets, then Covid-19, and the latest bit of news is a hot Saharan dust storm which will hit our shores and bring dry and dusty air, an altered weather pattern, and possible health issues. It's no wonder that many of us want to get away from the world. 2020 has brought a Pandora's box of unexpected miseries in addition to our daily problems and concerns.

We're not the first Christian folk forced to cope with the nature of the world. Over the centuries, Christians have faced many difficulties, and those hardships brought broken relationships between people and God. In the 1930s, it was economic depression and drought. In the middle ages, it was classism and black plague. For the Christians of the 3rd and 4th centuries, it was lives dominated by secular materialism which wedged a barrier between the people and God. The ancient desert fathers and mothers coped by leaving the worldly distractions behind and escaping to the desert where they could focus solely on their devotion to God.

Those early desert mothers and fathers were trying to revive true Christian devotion and simplicity of life by intense renunciation of worldly things. Their experience has relevance for us today. I'm not suggesting that we give up on the whole world but what is it that we can give up that draws us closer to God? When the world asked, "How can I get more?" The ancients asked, "What can I do without?" When the world asked, "How can I find myself?" The ancients asked, "How can I lose myself?" When the world asked, "How can I win friends and influence people?" The desert mothers and fathers asked, "How can I love God?"

Anthony (251-356 A.D.) was born to a wealthy family, yet when he heard the passage from Matthew 19:21, "If you wish to be perfect..." he immediately gave away his inheritance and moved to a life of solitude. When he emerged from his desert life, he was known for his graciousness, love, kindness, endurance, meekness, freedom from anger and his practice of prayer. Anthony was recognized for his unique compassion and many sought him out for help with healing and spiritual direction.

Anthony and the other desert fathers and mothers did not succumb to life's problems, rather they discovered how to defeat life's miseries by turning to God. They learned to remove the distractions that become wedges between us and our relationship with Christ. We don't necessarily need to run away to the desert to find God to relieve us from worldly pressures. We need only to recognize the distractions of our world and set them aside, and then we can see and feel God's presence with us. We need not run away from the world, rather we ought to run to Jesus. Christ, who is God with us, gives us the strength we need to cope with whatever life brings. His perfection will see us through whatever life brings our way.

*Prayer: Take my life, take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.*

*Blessings,*

*Rev. Dell King*  
Interim Associate Pastor

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