

Escape ordinary?

By [Guy Sayles](#)

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Two intriguing entertainment venues have recently opened in downtown Asheville, North Carolina: Conundrum and Breakout. They use virtual reality and other technologies to create adventures of escape, journeys from lost to found, and mysteries to explore.

Participants assume new identities as hostages, questers, secret agents, or detectives. It's like being in a movie as it unfolds or bringing a mystery thriller to life. For a couple of hours, be like Jason Bourne, Katniss Everdeen, Stephanie Plum, or a Ghostbuster.

I understand the drawing power of this kind of entertainment. We face daunting problems which seem to elude solution, so it's reassuring to deal with a problem we might actually be able to solve. It's good practice for dealing with hard things outside the safe container of a temporary fictional world.

And many people feel lost or bound. They're not sure where they are, but they know they're not home.

They have a sense that something in them or around them holds them back, keeps them down, or locks them up.

The experience of making it from lost to found, or from bound to free, relieves them for a time from existential lostness or boundedness.

This kind of entertainment is also uncertain, not predictable: the outcome depends, to some extent, on what the participants do or don't do. The unexpected is expected.

It's not easy, at least not *too* easy: problems are part of the process. Dilemmas are part of the deal.

It's communal, not solitary: participants have to work together to gain freedom, to reach their destination, or to make the most of their adventure.

It engages the whole person, body, mind, and emotions. The adventures call for movement, demand thought, require courage, and inspire hope.

In many ways venues like Conundrum and Breakout tap in to needs that faith addresses—or could address. Being found, discovering freedom, leaning in to mystery, and becoming a new person are all themes which resonate with genuine faith. Adventure, risk, and courage are part of an authentic pilgrimage.

And, worship can be—should be—unpredictable, since God is vaster and more wonderful than we imagine. A god who doesn't surprise us isn't God.

Worship should inspire us to offer our bodies, minds, hearts, and spirits in love for God and neighbor.

Worship should challenge us to keep moving, growing, and becoming. It should cause us to accept and welcome one another's gifts and insights. None of us can worship or live well in isolation from a loving and questing community of fellow-travelers.

"Escape Ordinary" is a tagline one of these entertainment venues uses, and I get it. Too many people live with chronic boredom and numbing routine. To step in to an experience that is interesting and different is a welcome diversion.

Faith offers us a way to plunge so deeply and gratefully into the ordinary that it isn't ordinary at all. Faith, as William Blake said, "cleanses the doors of perception" and enables us to see the infinite in and through finite things. Extraordinary is in the ordinary—not apart from it.

Treasure is often underfoot, in the very paths we y already walk. Beauty is everywhere, even in apparent bleakness. Wonder hides in plain sight.

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