

Staying power: Luke 24:36-49; Acts 3:12-19

by [William Brosend](#) in the [April 19, 2000](#) issue

Cleopas and his unnamed (female?) companion get all the credit. Everyone preaches about an “Emmaus road experience.” Nobody preaches about a “stayed-in-Jerusalem-and-waited-to-see-what-happened experience.” Everybody preaches about how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread, but nobody preaches about what happened after Jesus asked, “Have you anything here to eat?” Which goes to show that staying put rarely gets much credit.

I am doing a lot of staying put lately. Cancer does that to a family. My 76-year-old father is dying of cancer. Hospice is involved, as well as my sister, who lives around the corner from Dad, and who has taken leave from her hospital chaplaincy and postponed her seminary studies to take 98 percent of the responsibility. I blow in when I can from my home 400 miles away, thankful for every chance to share the wonder and mystery and blessing of these last days.

Staying put. We don’t know how many years the lame man was carried to the Beautiful Gate by his friends. Was it 38 years, like the lame man in John 5, or 12 years, like the woman in Mark 5? Staying put. A lot can happen if we are willing to stay put.

I came to my current parish, my fourth, 15 years into ordination. Since the typical call or appointment now lasts 4.5 years, I am an average minister. My father was ordained in 1948 and served four churches before his first “retirement” (he served two more parishes and one retirement community after that, resigning the last position only a few weeks ago). Staying power. Lyle Schaller and other church consultant gurus have long preached the importance of long pastorates, of staying put to see what happens. What is my hurry? And what do I have to show for it?

In *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, his wonderful 1992 “exploration in vocational holiness,” Eugene Peterson searched the Jonah narrative for keys and clues to pastoral presence and practice. Recalling St. Benedict’s addition of a vow of stability to traditional monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, Peterson determined to stay at his first parish for his entire ministry. He was bucking a trend:

“Somehow we American pastors, without really noticing what was happening, got our vocations redefined in the terms of American careerism. We quit thinking of the parish as a location for pastoral spirituality and started thinking of it as an opportunity for advancement.” Not that Peterson was never tempted to move on, with or without the shake-the-dust-off-my-feetism that too easily moves many of us out of parishes, businesses, schools and homes. But he stayed put and found that “something interesting happened each time. After swallowing my pride and accommodating myself to my frustrations, I found depths in my own life emerging into awareness and, along with them, depths in the congregation that I had no idea existed.”

Of course, the man lame from birth had no say in the matter. He had to stay where someone placed him. But when he was healed what did he do? He began *walking and leaping and praising God* as he went into the temple. The language emphasizes that he walked and leaped and danced *where he was*. He stayed put. When the disciples were arrested for their provocative acts and sermons and given a night in jail to cool their ardor they insisted on staying put: we cannot keep from speaking, they said, about what we have seen and heard.

In the Jerusalem appearance scene Jesus emphasizes staying put, contrasting the corporeality of his presence with that of a ghost (which might have been news to Cleopas and companion, from whose sight Jesus had recently “vanished”). To deepen the demonstration Jesus enjoys a little broiled mahi-mahi “in their presence.” In the postscript to the scene he again opens their minds to understand the scriptures and concludes with one commandment: Stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.

Stay here. Everything about our culture seems to say “get moving.” Jesus says stay put. This is not for everyone, every time. There are jobs, schools and relationships in which staying put is an invitation to disaster and destruction. Sometimes leaving certain callings and vocations is the only blessed possibility. But these times are fewer and farther between than we are conditioned to suppose. Our reasons for leaving are usually less holy, more of a grass-is-greener restlessness than a vision of someone in a Macedonia calling “come over and help us.” Accepting the prevailing pace and priorities means packing up more often than is probably healthy. We miss what we might discover if we stayed put, especially if we decide to move in the mistaken hope that we will find things much different in a new place.

A few years ago I went to the bookstore for a book. Being a guy I searched high and low before asking anyone for assistance. Finally I approached a clerk and asked, "Do you have *If You're Not Where You Are, You're Nowhere?*" He did not. So I checked the reference. The book I wanted was titled *Wherever You Go, There You Are*.

Jesus said, "I am with you always." Imagine what we might experience if we learned to truly be where we *are*, and stayed put long enough to explore and discover all the wonderful ways Jesus is truly with us.