



Escaping Our Confines

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Rachel Yates

It all sounded pleasant enough when I read it on the agenda. Evening devotions would be held in the rooftop lounge. I anticipated we'd be high enough to get a glimpse of Lake Erie. The reality was far from pleasant.

With other delegates from the Ghana Mission Network meeting, I rode the elevator to the lounge. As the doors opened, we were hit with a blast of heat and humidity. In this tiny upstairs room, Ghanaians and Americans sweltered together. We longingly eyed the large sliding glass doors that opened onto the rooftop patio – a promise of a fresh breeze and lake views. Then we saw the sturdy padlocks that prevented the doors from sliding even a crack.

While we waited for everyone to arrive, someone noticed the face of another delegate, looking into the room through the glass of the locked stairwell door. Before we could shout a warning, someone took the instinctive step of pushing the bar to unlock this emergency exit door, so the man could join us. Pressing the bar set off a high-pitched, squealing alarm. No building manager rushed to our aid, and our fiddling with door lock proved futile. We might have tolerated the sweltering heat, but the alarm drove us from the room – in groups of five, the most that could fit at one time into the tiny elevator.

We reconvened on the front steps of the building, where we felt the longed-for evening breeze and where birds sang, instead of door alarms. Buoyed by our new surroundings, we sang hymns in Twi and English; we listened to Scripture; and we shared reflections about the relation of the Word to our lives. Residents of Erie passed by on the sidewalk, wondering no doubt about the colorful nature of our gathering.

I wondered then how many of Jesus' disciples had felt confined in their upper room. Plush upper rooms had long been evidence of privilege, but even more simple households used such living spaces to rise above the din from the street. Of course, it offered a degree of safety and anonymity for the disciples especially. The disciples had eaten a Passover meal with Jesus in an upper room; they prayed with him there; they encountered Jesus again after his resurrection; and they naturally returned there to consider their next steps.

But, still I wonder, did the upper room become stifling – at least spiritually? After the Spirit alighted on the disciples at Pentecost, they were driven out of their upper room, just like the delegates at the Ghana Mission Network who fled the rooftop lounge. The gospel could no longer be contained; it was not simply a shared experience of a few. It was a story that had to be told. At the Ghana Mission Network conference, we shared that story on the front steps leading down to the sidewalk.

Where do you tell your story of how the gospel has affected you? Our upper rooms, literal and figurative, are comfortable and secure, but they can be confining too. You steward a gospel that is too wild and free to be confined to an upper room – or a sanctuary – for only a lucky few. I encourage you to come down from your secure places and meet the Spirit on the sidewalk. A breeze is blowing in our midst. Can you feel it?