

Stop requested

Pat Marrin | Jun. 10, 2009 NCR Today



A long digital panel at the front of the bus posts the date and time and, when a rider pulls the cord strung above the windows, the display says succinctly; "Stop Requested."

The Broadway musical "Stop the World, I Want to Get Off," comes to mind. Or a poignant moment on the Sunday morning news program, "Meet the Press" in 1968, when Robert Kennedy, besieged by questions about his possible presidential gambit, sighed audibly and said, "I can't very well leave the planet," though in effect he would depart abruptly on June 6 of that tumultuous year.

It was a turning point year, marked by Kennedy's assassination in Los Angeles, the murder of Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis, the execution of Che Guevara in the jungles of Bolivia, and the sudden flicker and suppression of democratic aspiration known as the "Prague Spring" in eastern Europe. Richard Nixon would become president, the era of freedom that had produced civil rights, women's liberation, Woodstock and the Second Vatican Council would be replaced by Realpolitik and law-and-order pragmatism. Depending on your point of view, it would have been a good time to leave the planet.

Who hasn't, at some time in his or her life, wished they could just vacate the world, leaving behind all its dilemmas and uncertainties? Escapism does not require final absentia. It can be achieved by withdrawal into somnolence, disengagement, a vacation from the news, simple self-distraction.

In today's Gospel from Matt 5:17 ff, Jesus makes clear that he did not come to end history, abolish the rules or gather up the good and depart. He was here to complete God's will, even though it must have seemed like a barely visible thread running through an immense, tangled mess of human confusion and perversity. "I have come not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them," down to the smallest detail. God's will be done, God's kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus' departure was, we believe, actually his reappearance in us. He is still on the bus with us and in us. The work of being in the world is considerable and not always easy to discern. As Dorothy Day once said, "Life itself is a haphazard, untidy, messy affair." All the more reason to show up, plunge into our own small corner today to see if we can fulfill even a small task that will help complete God's purposes.