



Meditation For Feb. 19

It probably wouldn't be an understatement if I said the past four years have been like four years with a badly upset stomach. The political turmoil generated by the previous President of the United States produced a level of tension that spread around the world. Relations with Russia, China, Iran and other powers have gone downhill precipitously; political differences have even divided families, good friends, and neighbours. There is a cure, or at least some relief from this turmoil. Some of the recent meditations we have read have talked about just stepping out the door, the way Pastor Perry and Lore did, and into Mother Nature's world, and spending time with the wonderful natural gifts that God has given us. Or, doing something totally different and over the top like Bernadette, Don and Ron did at a live show of "Let's Make a Deal," where it was all about an "attitude of gratitude." We need these kind of breaks from our crazy manmade world, even if just for an hour or so each day.

I have been very fortunate to have had access to some of the more unusual natural wonders that God has gifted us, and this has also brought me in contact with total strangers, who for no reason other than the fact they were decent people, cheered me and helped me at times when I had inevitably gotten myself into an awkward spot.

During my time in Germany, I lived in the industrial northwest of the country, but I had made the acquaintance of a couple who annually vacationed in Greece, and who invited me to babysit their home whenever they were on vacation. Their home was located in the small Bavarian alpine village of Oberstaufen, in the Algäu Region of the Alps. Oberstaufen is a four to five hour drive south from where I lived in Dortmund-Hombruch. Europeans love hiking, and most countries are covered by networks of hiking trails. In the Bavarian Alps that means mountain hiking and climbing and meeting perfect strangers who accept you as a long-time friend. By the way, in Bavaria, everybody, and I mean everybody, salutes you with a cheerful "Gruß Gott" whenever and wherever they meet you. Wouldn't it be nice if every time we met someone on the street, we greeted each other with a friendly Hi or Good Day?

The mountains in the Algäu aren't particularly high; for instance Nebelhorn, which is not too far from the area I'm talking about, is a little better than 7,200 feet (Nebel = fog, horn= peak)....it's

peak sticks into the fog (clouds). On with the story. One day, I was walking along a narrow grat (ridge) connecting two mountains. I was wearing my usual hiking uniform, as shown in the photo at top, taken on another day. My t-shirt was always in my backpack. A cloud rolled in, reducing visibility, it started to rain, and the wind came up. It was getting dangerous, and it was time to get out of there, so I traversed down the mountain, having to work my way around some very steep parts, but I ran into sunshine when I neared the base. However, things did not look familiar, and at base level, one mountain looks like any other. I had absolutely no idea where I was, and there was no sign of the village at the mountain base where I had started out from. I was near a small road and after awhile a farmer came along, driving a little Suzuki Samurai, something like a small Jeep. I asked him where my base town was....."On the other side of the mountain," says he, "you're in Austria." Oops! In my haste to get off that ridge, I had become disoriented in the fog and had come down the wrong side of the mountain, and without an Austrian passport. This presented a couple of serious problems.... It was mid-afternoon by now; I had registered at the summit house before I started out, and if I didn't show up by 5pm, the rescue crew with dogs would come looking for me. (a) they would feed me to the dogs, but (b) not before I had paid several hundred Deutschmarks for the cost of the search. This was where true friendship kicks in.... realizing my quandary, the farmer says he can get me part way up the mountain. Off we go in the Samurai, off the road onto a little trail the locals used to bypass the customs/immigration station between Austria and Germany. He got me about a third of the way up the mountain, but I still had some hard climbing ahead of me. On the way up I met an Austrian climber coming down, who informed me I was about five hundred metres (vertically) from the top. He was so friendly, but I had to laugh the way he looked me up and down, because he was suitably toggled out in leather breeches, with long woollen socks, a jaunty grey felt Jägerhut with feather on his head, and long walking stick. I was standing there, stripped to the waist, in shorts, and sweating like an enraged bull.

Anyways, I made it to the top in good time, and the rescue crew had a good laugh when I told them my tale. However, the point of my story is, it was a nasty situation, but there was so much friendship and help extended to a perfect stranger that day, that more than made up for all the concern and stress. The world needs more of that. It doesn't cost a cent, and doesn't require any extra effort, but it sure makes a person feel good all over.

There was an aura of understanding and friendship about Jesus; no matter whether a person was a friend or foreigner, or whether they had a serious illness or were in distress, Jesus reached out to them, and helped them find a way up their mountain. As disciples of Jesus, may we also reach out to others in distress and help them find a way up their mountain.