

19th March 2022

Escape

“I call that mind free, which sets no bounds to its love, which is not imprisoned in itself or in a sect, which recognises in all human beings the image of God and the rights of his children, which delights in virtue and sympathises with suffering wherever they are seen, which conquers pride, anger and sloth, and offers itself a willing victim to the cause of mankind.”

William Ellery Channing, Spiritual Freedom (1830)

I know it's unusually lengthy, but, like all good quotations, the words above shouldn't need any elaboration from me. However, the context for quoting them today might still be useful.

William Channing's words came to mind when I was watching a day-time TV programme: *Escape to the Country*. It has an interesting premise: finding an idyllic setting which will provide a better lifestyle and appealing future for people, rather than remaining where they are. The "where they are" is usually a city. The "escape" is moving to a rural location, usually when circumstances have changed, family have "flown the nest", and life might take a different direction. It makes fascinating watching.

But for me, there's an unexplored element to these programmes: What are people escaping *from*? An urban location, of course, and the pressures of that. A restriction of choices, maybe, with the expectation that "the country" will help deal with a lack of options. But does a change of circumstances help people face who they are and what their inner needs might be? Will a change of location negate the need to look at personal issues or attitudes? Does an "escape to the country" offer "spiritual freedom", or could it imply an avoidance of deeper things?

Freedom, as Channing tells us so eloquently, is about who we are, how we are with each other and what we do with the issues of our day. No material or locational change will automatically deal with such things.

There's a 3rd millennium BC Sumerian proverb which runs:

He who keeps fleeing, flees from his own past.

No escape to the country, or anywhere else for that matter, will allow us to flee from the spiritual core of our being, in the past, present or future.

A prayer for today

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me.

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

Psalm 139: 1, 7