

Excerpt from, *Mountains Beyond Mountains : The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World*, written by Tracy Kidder.

pp. 79 – 80. (Farmer) Working as a medical volunteer at the Hospital St. Croix in Leogane, Haiti, he got to know a young American doctor. “He loved the Haitians,” Farmer said, “He was a very thoughtful guy.” The man had worked in Haiti for about a year. Now, in a few days, he was going back to the United States. “I realized, hearing him talk, that something had happened to me already,” Farmer said. “I wasn’t feeling judgmental. Haiti was something he was seeing that he could leave and release from his mind, and I was thinking, Could I do that? He was leaving Haiti, really leaving in body and mind, and I realized I was going to have trouble with that.”

“Isn’t it going to be hard to leave?” he asked the young doctor.

“Are you kidding? I can’t wait. There’s no electricity here. It’s just brutal here.”

But aren’t you worried about not being able to forget all this? There is so much disease here.”

“No,” the doctor said. “I’m an American, and I’m going home.”

“Right. Me, too,” said Farmer.

He thought about that conversation all the rest of the day and into the evening. “What does that mean, ‘I’m an American’? How do people classify themselves?” He understood the doctor’s position, but he didn’t really know his own.

From Focus a newsletter of JVC Northwest, Fall 2009, “Still Ruined for Life?” – excerpt by Bob Harper (St. Mary’s, AK ’72-73)

“After I returned home I remember shouting the JVC mantra ‘ruined for life ‘quite a lot. Sure, it was understandable that I felt changed by my experience in Alaska, but had I actually been transformed, permanently? Was such a transformation even possible that quickly, especially for someone in their early 20s? Would the rest of my life be different because of this one year?

The people and experiences of that JVC year did change me. The simple act of saying yes to the experience in the first place altered the course of my life. For the rest of my days I would reflect on it, talk about it, be asked to explain it. And every time that happens, I am changed a little more.

...Yes, I suppose in a manner of speaking JVC did ‘ruin my life.’ But another way to view it is that it was simply one good choice in an already ruined life. That JVC year exposed me to many wonderful people and experiences, but it also exposed something that was already in me, that has always been in me. St. Paul referred to it when he said: ‘I live now not my own life, but the life of Christ who lives in me*.’ You see, I think the trick is to realize that our lives are not about our choices and decisions or our successes and failures. Our lives are not about us. They are about understanding Paul when he says again: ‘You are hidden with Christ in God, and he is your life’ And that is the real discovery, the real transformation, the real exhilaration.”

**From Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God..."*

Reflection questions:

- 1) What has it been like to return from Belize? Explain.
- 2) What did you discover about yourself in Belize?
- 3) Now that you know, now that you have seen, how is this knowing mixing into your life on this campus and your vocation? How is your life as an American changed and transformed?
- 4) Bob Harper, in reflecting on his experiences with JVC Northwest, says:
“...I think the trick is to realize that our lives are not about our choices and decisions or our successes and failures. Our lives are not about us. They are about understanding Paul when he says again: ‘You are hidden with Christ in God, and he is your life.’ And that is the real discovery, the real transformation, the real exhilaration.”

What does this mean to you? How do Paul’s words echo with our Belize experiences?