

“TRAVELING LIGHTLY”

Mark 6:1-13 July 22nd, 2018

“Take nothing with you,” Jesus says today. Not a loaf of bread, or a bag, or a little extra cash, or an extra coat. Pack lightly. And so today I can’t help but wonder how Jesus might phrase this now. For not only are you and I certainly encumbered with more ‘stuff’ than Jesus’ first audience was, but the capability of that ‘stuff’ far outpaces anything first century folks could have ever imagined. But the concept is the same—pack lightly for your journey.

Rev. Janet Hunt speaks about being a ‘defensive packer.’ I really relate to that and I’m experiencing it all over again as I pack for vacation: what do I need for the Estes Park part of our vacation and what do I need for the rest of the time that will be a ‘staycation’ in Lakewood? And then what is the difference between what I think I *need* and what I *want* to take with me?

The story Rev. Hunt tells of being a defensive packer resonated with me and I think perhaps it will with you. She writes: I’m what you might call a ‘defensive packer.’ So you can probably imagine how I felt some years ago now when I needed to travel several hours away to a meeting. I’d gotten up early, taken a walk, paid some bills, and gathered the papers I would need for the lunch meeting on my calendar. I headed out of town with plenty of time to spare, arriving at the restaurant ahead of the others. I stepped to the counter and ordered my meal. I reached into my wallet and discovered it was not in its usual place. I checked and double-checked all the pockets and sure enough I was not mistaken. Finally, I looked at the young woman behind the counter and apologized, explaining I seemed to have left my wallet at home. I took a seat in a nearby booth to wait for my lunch companions. When they arrived they graciously picked up the tab for lunch that day. I called a colleague who insisted I stop by and she gave me \$10 for the road. When I finally arrived home I found myself ever so grateful as I thought about all that could have happened but did not in that day’s journey: things like a flat tire, or being stopped by the police—circumstances in which one’s wallet would certainly have come in handy.

“Traveling light’ as Jesus calls his disciples to do today certainly makes no sense, does it? Especially since it wasn’t just an ordinary lunch meeting the were headed out to attend. Indeed, especially not given the potential danger Jesus was asking them to walk into. For, in fact, we’ve already heard that those who had heard Jesus in the synagogue were more than skeptical about his origins

and that in spite of his ability to heal, believing was beyond their grasp. And yet, Jesus sends his followers out there in a very vulnerable state.

Now it is true, of course, that you and I live in a much different time than did Jesus and his disciples. It is true that perhaps ‘hospitality to the stranger’ played a larger role in that place and time, so it was more likely that their needs would have been met regardless of what they hadn’t packed for themselves. It is also true Jesus’ first disciples didn’t own nearly as much as I do that I like to carry with me wherever I go.

Let’s think for a moment about what Jesus might ask us to leave behind if we were going to travel lightly. What are some ideas you have for what he might ask you to leave behind?.....*Invite the congregation to make suggestions.* Now I wonder what would cause us the most anxiety to not have with us as we travel. What do you think?...(Cell phones will certainly come up.) Why and how do we find ourselves relying on our phones? (*Possible answers: finding an unfamiliar address, getting directions for how to get here and calculating how long it will take, finding a hospital or off site wedding venue, call or text or instant message someone at any time of the day or night...*) What would be the positives and negatives of leaving them behind? (*Allow discussion time....*)

Going back to Janet Hunt for a minute. She writes: Of late, I have used my cell phone to track my morning bike ride. It does a great job of mapping my ride, reporting time, speed, distance, and calories burned. It surely helps me keep track of my goals and whether I am accomplishing what I hoped to accomplish. It does not however, help me appreciate:

The beauty of a pink sunrise while the almost full moon is still high in the sky; the sight of an Illinois corn field on a warm summer morning; the sound of the pair of goldfinches which flew alongside me for a while; or the cheerful voice of the one who passed me on her own bike, wishing good morning; or the example of the older couple walking slowly along the bike path holding hands; or the sheer sense of accomplishment that I got up and out on my bike at all when an extra hour’s sleep seemed awfully attractive.

So it seems to me that this was at least part of the reason behind Jesus’ instruction today to leave it behind.

The intent is that we leave all that stuff behind that gets in the way of our seeing, truly seeing the world God made and the people who inhabit it.

His intent is to have us set aside that which makes us believe that we are fully self-reliant in this world, for, in fact, we are not.

The intent surely is to give ourselves a chance to appreciate the community God is yearning for us to experience and rely upon. To do all we can to see, to really see those to whom we are sent. For to not do so will likely mean that whatever gifts we are meant to bear to the world will neither be given nor received in the fullest way God intends them.

Keeping in the spirit of Jesus' words now and he is giving us these instructions to travel lightly, do you think he would ask us to leave behind our cell phones? What else might make the list today? (*Allow discussion of possibilities.*) I am making the supposition that Jesus tells the disciples to leave all that stuff behind so that they might be more aware of their own need for others, their own need to be reliant upon God and God's good gifts, and to be better able to share those gifts with the world. Would you have another reason or explanation for Jesus' instructions? What would that be? (*More discussion, hopefully, as the congregations digs deeper into what Jesus' words mean for us today...*)

So perhaps Jesus' sending the disciples out 'traveling light' makes perfect sense after all. Maybe this is especially true when we are sent with the Good News as the disciples were...so that both those who are sent and those who are receiving would more fully be able to receive the gifts of God.

May we go into the world to share the Good News of the Gospel, trusting that God is with us and providing us with what we really need—His loving presence with us on the journey! Amen and amen.