

“Traveling Light”

Luke 10:1-12; Psalm 30

Summer is a time for traveling light. From the amount of clothing we wear as we walk about, to the shoes we put on at leisure, to the amount of stuff we tend to carry around, everything gets a little lighter. Even vacations are, at least are supposed to be, about leaving all our accumulated stuff behind, and “getting away from it all.”

Even our Summertime Gospel lesson from Luke, this morning, has to do with traveling light. Jesus calls his disciples together, gives them authority and sends them out, to carry the Good News of God’s love, to preach, to teach, to heal, and to confront evil wherever they find it; to be his advance party. He charges them to carry no purse, no bag, and no sandals.

Contrast Jesus’ instructions with the typically dressed person in Palestine at that time. He or she would have had at least five articles of clothing: two tunics; one was an inner garment, the other, an outer one used as a cloak by day and a blanket by night. Then there was a girdle, a kind of waistband worn around the two tunics, a head covering, and sandals. A purse or traveler’s bag was carried for food and money; and was slung over the shoulder. But Jesus told his followers to leave most of that behind. His advance party was to travel light so that they would depend on him for provision, and so be free to share his love with others.

There is a message here for you and me. We are called to be in Jesus’ advance party; called to share the story of our faith in him with others wherever we are. As with these early disciples, Jesus sends us out too. Yet, so often we find ourselves bogged down with stuff, with things. But not just to material things. There is other baggage that can weigh us down. Are we so over-obligated to lesser causes, that the real priorities get only brief attention? And what of emotional baggage: old scores,

unsettled and festering resentments? Dragging so much baggage with us, so preoccupied with such a variety of things, we find it difficult to focus on Jesus' call for our lives. So, what are we to do?

The answer to that question begins with an image in our Psalm this morning. We hear the Psalmist give thanks to God for "drawing him up." It's the same language that is used in the Twenty-Third Psalm when it says, "He restores my soul." We know ourselves to occasionally need drawing up and restoring. And this shepherding image that the 30th and 23rd Psalm share can help us picture how the Lord works this in our lives.

You see, from time to time a shepherd is required to draw up and restore the sheep. Sheep, it seems, have a tendency to, quite literally, get, "cast down." What happens is that the shepherd will find a sheep on its back, all four legs straight up in the air, and unable to get back up. The attentive shepherd will set the sheep on its feet again, massaging life back into its limbs. Thus, the shepherd draws up and restores the sheep.

What causes the sheep to become cast down in the first place? Most often it's simply a result of having too much wool. The sheep's fleece becomes very long and thick, heavily matted with mud and burrs and other debris, so that it is weighed down with its own wool, so much so that it can topple over and be rendered nearly helpless. Sheep do not particularly enjoy being sheared, but when it is over, there is a great relief. There is no longer the threat of being cast down and there is pleasure in being set free from the hot, heavy coat; set free to follow the shepherd once again.

The analogy is pretty obvious. Most of us have too much stuff. Too much stuff can be a problem for a follower of Jesus. The more things we accumulate, whether material, or time consuming, or emotionally

crippling, the more our freedom is restricted. The more such stuff we have, the more it demands our attention. The more attached we get to our stuff the harder it is to hear the call of Jesus. But, if we will let him, Jesus will “draw us back up,” and, “restore our souls.” In doing so, he will help us to once again travel light.

Jesus’ call to travel light, though, is more than just a call to be less dependent on things. It is also a call to simplify our lives; to become more carefree. Here is a short prose that says it all. It’s one I know you know or have certainly read before in some form or other. It’s entitled, “If I had my life to live over.” There are several versions of it that can be found on-line by a number of different authors. This version I think is the best. It was written by Erma Bombeck who wrote it in her last year as she faced terminal cancer.

If I had my life to live over, I’d pick more daisies.
I’d try to make more mistakes next time.
I would be sillier than I have been this trip.
I would relax, I would limber up.
I know very few things I would take seriously.
I would take more trips, travel lighter.
I would be crazier. I would be less hygienic.
I would take more chances.
I would climb more mountains, swim more rivers, and watch more sunsets.
I would eat more ice cream, and less bran.
I would have more actual troubles and fewer imaginary ones.
You see, I am one of those people who live practically and sensibly and sanely,
Hour after hour, day after day.
Oh, I have had my mad moments, and if I had it to do over again, I’d have more of them. Just moments, one after another, instead of living so many minutes ahead.

I have been one of those people who never go anywhere
Without a thermometer, a hot water bottle, a gargle, a raincoat, and
road map.

If I had my life to live over,
I would start barefooted earlier in the Spring,
And stay that way later in the fall.
I would ride more merry-go-rounds, and swings more.
I would do more water and sun-fun things.

I'd turn more somersaults, and roll in the grass, and go barefoot all
over.

If I had my life to live over,
I'd spend more time at fun places.
I'd try to be more in touch with God and those I love.
I'd pray aloud more and not care what people think or expect of me.
I'd just be me more and more...
Yes, I'd pick more daisies next time.

Jesus calls us, loves us, and then sends us out. He gives us the
opportunity to be his advance party. He calls us to travel light; to shed
our excess wool, to un-complicate, to simplify, to catch a kind of lovely
naiveté once again. To move with Jesus means that we don't have to
take all of our baggage with us.

What is bogging you down? What excess baggage might you be
carrying? Too much stuff? Too busy? Life too complicated? Is the Lord
calling you to leave behind the emotional baggage of complaints,
grudges, and resentments? Healing often has to do with unpacking,
shedding all those things that weigh us down.

Accept Jesus' invitation to travel light. You will fall in love again with
your life of faith; you will gain courage for the rough spots, and, with
the prayer support of your friends, a skip in your step and a song in
your heart. Travel light!