

Jesus' Travel Instructions

Time after Pentecost - Lectionary 14
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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20

It sounds simple enough, this Gospel text for today – the sending forth of the 70 in pairs to every town and place where Jesus himself intended to go. It sounds simple enough, until we realize that we've heard these instructions before, or better said, the disciples heard them before. All three synoptic Gospels tell us of Jesus' instructions to the twelve disciples; virtually those same words that I just read. But only in Luke do we have the same instructions given to the 70 others and what we have here, very clearly, is instructions not just for a chosen few, but marching orders for all those who would follow Jesus. These recorded instructions move the commissioning into ministry beyond the twelve and into the rank and file, and, that my friends in Christ, is us.

So, we need to pay attention, for Jesus is speaking to us today – travel instructions for missionaries, those who are sent by Jesus into the world with news. And although the instructions seem simple, a little probing unveils some profound insights that we need to take seriously.

Instruction number one – “Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals” (vs. 4). In other words, travel light; that was and is his first word for us. And when we think about it back in those days, that wasn't bad advice. It was common sense. The more stuff they would take on their trip, the more they would have to worry about, the slower they could travel, and the more their energies and thoughts would have to be devoted to those *things* rather than on their preaching and healing mission.

Travel light! Now, I don't know about you, but when I pack for any trip, I end up taking far, far too much stuff along. Maybe Jesus was hitting a point here about basic human nature. If I go to a conference, like I did in May, I pack my brief case with more books and journals than I could possibly read in a month even if I attended no meetings at all. If I go on vacation, I pack clothes for every conceivable weather pattern that exists in the northern hemisphere.

But there is a serious and deeper message here for us in this first instruction and it goes far beyond how much any of us pack for vacations, and has everything to do with what we pack for life.

Jesus knew that *things* have a way of accumulating on any journey, and even more importantly, those things begin to become important extensions of us. We begin to identify who we are in society by the things we acquire. The more we have, the more we want, the more successful we may feel.

But things, Jesus knew also, have a way of encumbering us. The more we have, the more we must care for, the more time and energy that goes into upkeep and maintenance, the less time for other activities. And it was those other activities, that preaching and healing mission, that was primary for those early disciples, not the things which they might gather and that would hold them back.

Now, please don't misunderstand this point. Jesus had nothing against things per se. He knew that people had to eat, to be clothed and housed. But he also knew of the possessiveness of possessions. He knew that it was possible to have so much that what we have possesses us and not the other way around. And what Jesus wanted his disciples to remember was that the thing they could not live without was his power and authority, not the things they carried and claimed as their own.

Father Gerard Sloyan, a well-known Roman Catholic theologian and writer, once reflected on things and the advice of Jesus to travel light. This is what he wrote:

I have never found any virtue in traveling light. . . . At my first eight-day retreat, I arrived with three suitcases, a yoga mat, two six packs of sparkling water and appropriate crafts spilling out of my tote bags – in case the meditations were not sufficiently compelling. My director happened to be walking by the registrations desk when I brought in the last load.

'This is all you have?' he asked. I nodded. 'Well,' he said, 'I can see we have a lot of work to do on trust.' He was right.

The following year I returned as a director myself – one suitcase lighter but still heavily laden and still sheepish. That evening, my first retreatant said to me, 'I am beginning to learn that my relationship with God is not a matter of doing things, not even a matter of being done for on the part of the church of which I am a member; it is a matter of undoing.'

A mirror had been held up. The challenge? To be less filled with my things so that I could be more obedient in the root sense of the word '*ob audire*,' to listen. I know I will at least forgo the sparkling water this year.

Now, few of us need to take that advice to the point of joining a religious order, but he has hit a nerve for all of us. Our identity comes from being God's children, not from things. Our security comes from trusting in God's word, not from material possessions. And our ability to hear and respond to that word can be encumbered if we don't learn to travel our religious paths in a light fashion. Travel light; unencumbered – practical advice back then; prophetic advice for us today.

Do you see what I mean about simple words with profound meanings for our lives?

Second instruction, equally mundane at first reading – "greet no one on the road" (vs. 4b). Now at first hearing that may sound like a bit of snobbery – "greet no one on the road." But, again, Jesus knows human nature. There was a job to do and it entailed getting to a destination so that healing and words of comfort and salvation could be spoken. To dawdle on the road, to spend precious moments in mundane and meaningless chatter, to stop and chat about the weather or those pathetic Orioles was not their mission. They had a job to do and he didn't want them to be distracted.

Do we know something about distractions? Oh, yes. How often in our lives does a tragedy happen to us or to someone we love and we say, "I know now or remember now what is important in life"? Where do we find meaning and fulfillment in our lives? Is it at the soccer field watching our kids play week after week only to have them announce in high school that they've had enough of soccer and its disciplines? Or is it coming and

being among a group of seekers and learners being reminded about what is important and hearing and seeing and tasking life-giving faith? I have nothing against soccer, mind you; substitute what you will for that illustration, but it stands on its truth. As the people of God, we are given a task, "To go to all nations of the world and to baptize and teach in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." That great commission is our commission, our sending forth, and in this instruction for travelers, he is reminding us that there is an urgency to our message. This is news about life and death.

So, Jesus' second instruction boils down to this – don't get so distracted by the everyday that we forget the real meaning and purpose to our lives. Soccer, movies, entertainment, golf aren't it!

The third instruction, and here Jesus gets to the task at hand – to announce peace, to heal the sick and to say, "The Kingdom of God has come near to you." Notice we are not the saviors here; we are the bearers of Good News that the Kingdom of God is breaking forth in this world and we are to be those who point to it for others to see. We point to the life-giving water of the font and we say, "There is God at work laying claim to our lives." We point to the refreshing bit of food set before us at a meal which is but a foretaste of the great banquet to come and we say, "There is God feeding us his body and blood for the strength we need for our journeys wherever they may take us." We point to where the hungry are fed, the homeless are housed, the sick are given care and we say, "There is God at work through the loving hands of his people."

We are to be bearers of the Word of God, announcing that God's Kingdom is already breaking forth about us and we are to point to those places for all to see. And when they do not, we have his final word of instruction for us: "But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into the streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you.'" (vs. 10-11). What this meant for those early disciples is that their time was too short to be wasted in futile arguments. Their business was to testify, to proclaim the arrival of the Kingdom, and to let their witness stand on its own merits.

And, as before, there is a message in that instruction for us today. Jesus knew and taught the difference between witnessing and arguing. On the one hand, we have the fact that no one can be argued into the faith. We know that. But on the other hand, no one comes to the faith without having been led to it by someone who shared the story of God's love and grace with them.

There we have it, simple, yet profound instructions for travelers in the faith. And as we continue the journey through this time in the church year often called "ordinary," Jesus' words remind us of the extraordinary nature of the road we walk in this world. We walk by faith; we walk with God; we walk with a mission and the authority of God to do His work; and we walk together. Maybe that's all we really need for our lives to be meaningful.

Something to think about as we pack for our journeys.

AMEN.

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