

July 4, 2021 – Mark 6:1-13

Next Sunday, I will not be here. Pastor Nathan Schuetze will be substituting for me. Instead, I will be heading to Ohio to visit my mom before she has hip surgery in a couple weeks. And if this seems sudden or unexpected, that's because it is. The past week has actually been a whirlwind of planning and preparation.

And I have no doubt that this next week will be just as busy. Because my family can't go anywhere or do anything without bringing stuff along. Lots and lots of stuff. We're only planning on being away for about five days. But I have no doubt that we will fill the back of our minivan with luggage.

It gets a little ridiculous. And it makes me think sometimes. It makes me think about how much stuff I have. How much really unnecessary stuff fills my home and office and life. Some of it is stuff that makes life more comfortable or more familiar. But other stuff is really pretty useless. It's simply there because I haven't gotten around to getting rid of it.

And it makes me think about what would happen if God called me to a different place for ministry. And I'm not just talking about a different church or a different city. I'm talking about a different country. A different continent.

I don't have any intention right now of going into international missions. But then again, neither did Jonah. Neither did Amos. Neither did Peter or John or any of the disciples.

So, who knows? It could happen. It could happen to you too. It could be happening to you right now. Maybe God is calling you to be a missionary. A missionary to another country. To another state. To your friends and neighbors. Maybe a missionary to your own family.

The truth is that every person who calls himself a disciple of Jesus Christ is a missionary. Because every one of us has a commission. A great commission. To make more disciples of all nations. Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And teaching them everything that Christ taught us.

So you are all sent on the road for Jesus. Just as those first twelve were sent. And I wonder what they were thinking when Jesus sent them out. Up until this point, they've already had a pretty bizarre rabbi-student relationship with Jesus. And now it's going to become even weirder.

Yes, it was commonplace in ancient Judea for a rabbi to have students and disciples, as Jesus did. But that's about where the similarities end. Because instead of the students going to the rabbi and pledging their loyalty to him, Jesus has gone to the students and pledged his loyalty to them. Instead of the rabbi coming from a great family of priests or scribes or elders living in Jerusalem, Jesus comes from a lowly family of laborers in a backwater town in Galilee. Instead of his disciples being the best and brightest that the religious schools could offer, his disciples are fishermen and tax collectors and nobodies.

Nothing about this has been completely normal. So when Jesus says, "I want you to go out on your own and make more disciples for me, before your training is even finished." I have to think by that point, the disciples just shrugged their shoulders and said, "Alright. Par for the course, I guess."

But then Jesus continues. He tells them that they should wear nothing but the clothes on their back and a staff to make sure they can stay on their feet. They shouldn't bring any food. They shouldn't bring any luggage. They shouldn't bring any money. They shouldn't even bring a change of clothes.

They should depend entirely on the kindness and hospitality of others. And if their hosts listen to their message, they should stay. And if they don't listen to them, they should leave and not come back. Shake the dust from their sandals as a testimony against them. And then move on.

Jesus wants them to travel light. Lighter than any of us would prefer to travel, I think. Lighter than many of us ever have travelled, I think. Maybe there are a few of you who hitchhiked across the country without a dime to your name, sometime in your youth. But I never did.

So here I am, with a house full of stuff. Not even able to make a five day trip without a filling the back of a minivan. And Jesus says that being his disciple means I should be ready and willing to leave at a moment's notice with only the clothes on my back. That's a scary thought.

But let's take a step back and look at why he says this. Because there's a lot of value, a lot of blessings in living like this. And there are a lot of lessons to be learned from living like this, even if we don't do it on a day to day basis.

First, traveling light kept the disciples focused on their mission. Being dependent on the hospitality of others meant that they couldn't shirk their task. They couldn't leave and then sit around their hotel room and do nothing. They couldn't go into a town and procrastinate. They couldn't sit and worry about how people would respond.

If they didn't find lodging in someone's home, then they were homeless. If they didn't find meals at someone's table, then they went hungry. Literally, their entire existence, their entire survival, rested on sharing the Gospel.

How would that change the way you think? The way you act? How many things would you give up if your next meal depended upon telling someone about Jesus Christ?

Second, traveling light kept the disciples focused on God's provision. All twelve disciples go out. And, in the end, all twelve disciples come back. They all survived because God was with them.

And I have to think this experience changed how they saw God's provision. Having a bed to sleep in at night was no longer a given. It was blessing. Giving thanks before a meal was no longer something done out of habit. It was genuine.

They saw in their task, in their very lives, the hand of God at work. A God who would never leave them nor forsake them. And I have to think that gave authority to their message. The best way to preach about the love of God is to experience the love of God. To know it. To live it. To spend every hour relying upon it. They did just that.

Finally, traveling light taught the disciples about the value of their message. I'm sure there are probably a few of you out there hearing this account and thinking, "Good grief. Jesus taught his disciples to be freeloaders? To be leeches upon others? A burden to society?"

But that assumes that the disciples were offering nothing in exchange for the beds they slept in and the meals they received. On the contrary, they offered something of priceless value. The disciples were getting a couple nights of food and rest. But they were giving to their hosts a flawless 10 carat diamond.

A diamond known as the good news of Jesus Christ. The good news that God has kept his covenant. He has kept his promises. And he always will keep his promises.

The good news that God is forgiving and gracious. Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Compassionate and merciful, even to sinners like you and me.

The good news that God so loved this sinful world that he sent his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For the Son did not come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Through his death. Through his resurrection. Through Baptism into his name.

The disciples accepted food and shelter, but they repaid their hosts with a treasure worth more than the house they slept in or the luggage they left behind. And I think that's the reason why Jesus tells them to leave if they're rejected.

"If your hosts can't see the value in what you're telling them, then don't stay. I don't want you to be seen as freeloaders and leeches. I want you to be seen as prophets and messengers from God. Delivering a precious Gospel of salvation."

Not everybody can see the value in that message. Jesus' own hometown of Nazareth couldn't. I'm sure there were many villages along the road for the disciples that couldn't. I wonder, even, if the disciples themselves knew the value of it when they first set out. But by the end they did.

We're faced with the same question. Do we understand the value of our message? Are we so burdened by the baggage in our lives that we miss the one thing of priceless value that's already in our possession? Do we have so much stuff in our lives and homes and even our church that we forget what good news we have to share?

I hope not. Because we have a road to walk as well. As missionaries to our families and friends and communities. Who need to hear about the love of God. Who need to see the value in what we share. And yes, they may reject it as well. We can't do anything about that.

But they'll never know its value if we don't know its value first. And if that means giving up a few things. Leaving behind a little baggage. Traveling a little lighter. I think it's worth it. Amen.