
We've all taken trips. Most of the time, trips are fun. Something we look forward to.

Maybe it's a trip to see friends and family.

Maybe it's a vacation where you will do some sightseeing and you carefully plan each sight you want to see, and the transportation from one place to the next, and the lodging, be it hotel, motel, AirBnb or VRBO.

Regardless of which kind of trip, and what your destination is, you give at least a little thought to the question, "What should I bring?" "What will the weather be like there?" "What will I need?" Packing lists are made and checked carefully. Some of us might be notorious OVER-packers, bringing lots of unused, clean clothing home. Others of us might be habitually under packers, realizing we forgot or didn't bring necessary clothes or other items, and we end up doing some shopping.

When your kids went to camp, you no doubt were given a "What to bring list."

If you were in the armed forces and sent on a mission, you were no doubt given a list of what to bring.

Whatever the case, wherever you've gone, for whatever reason, you gave thought to what to bring.

We all think about what we need to bring

when we embark on any trip or travel.

So, at a key moment in the development and training of the disciples, they are sent out on a journey with the instructions,

"take nothing for [your] journey except a staff;
no bread, no bag, no money in [your] belts"

Being able to take a staff was, I'm sure, welcomed by the disciples. It would help them walk and help them ward off wild animals.

But they had to be thinking,

"Really, Jesus? We are to

leave behind our bread,

Leave behind our bags (which of course would allow us to carry all the things we need for the trip),

And we are to leave behind our cash?

To quote the band U2, it's really

“all that [they] can’t leave behind.”

But Jesus says, yes, “you CAN leave it behind.

Go, my followers, and do my work, almost completely *possessionless*.”

This seems to make the disciples quite

disempowered and vulnerable on the one hand,

On the other hand, they are given GREAT power –

Jesus gives them authority over the unclean spirits. Wow, right?!

Don’t bring possessions, bring one agenda: healing, deliverance, restoration, and repentance.

Not coercion

Not an agenda,

Not condemnation

A quick word about repentance....

Isn’t repentance something that sets us apart as Christians? Who else out there is valuing and promoting repentance, let alone actually repenting themselves?!

It’s hard to turn away from selfish and self-centered ways to the self-sacrificial way of Jesus, isn’t it?!

Just like it’s hard to go out in weakness. . .

Going in weakness does not come naturally. We like strength, power, and influence.

Weakness and vulnerability? Not so much.

Just ask Paul about it as we heard in our reading from 1st Corinthians today. You’ve likely heard this language from Paul, lamenting his “thorn in the flesh.” No one is sure what this “thorn in the flesh is. . . is it an incurable skin disease?

We know Paul had problematic eyesight. Is that it? Is it a temptation to sin, like the sin of pride or wanting acclaim? Paul attributes it to an attack from Satan, and asks the Lord to take it away on three occasions.

But the Lord responds:

“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”

And Paul leans into this idea, saying,

“So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses,
so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”

“... I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; *for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.*”

Strength in weakness, isn't that how God works? Isn't that the incarnation, the all-powerful divine God becomes a weak and limited human being? Isn't that the very fabric of our salvation?

Speaking of weakness and limitations, come back with me to the beginning of our Gospel text, where we see Jesus in his hometown, a hometown that really can't conceive of such authority coming from the mouth of “little Jesus,” who grew up here, whose siblings they all know, the son of a carpenter.

He should be building things,
not speaking with authority, and doing deeds of power.
And the townspeople don't like it.

And Jesus's power is somehow limited by their lack of faith and belief.

One would assume that it's not simply that Jesus *can't*—surely, Jesus has the power to do whatever he wants.

Rather, it seems to be the case that Jesus *won't* do deeds of power.
For those who don't want to see who Jesus is, see his power,
Jesus doesn't bother with deeds of power.
For those who don't have eyes to see,
what use is it to try to convince them? Their minds are made up.

Interesting little aside. The text says he could hardly do anything, but only heal a few people. Only heal a few people? I'm sure it felt like Jesus did much for them!

We see an interesting twist then. Jesus, limited in his ability to do his work, enlists the disciples, sending them out two by two, to do the work of the kingdom, traveling without bag, bread, or money-belt.

Because to follow this Rabbi
is to be a servant,
is to let go of power,
Following this Rabbi means being vulnerable for the sake of the neighbor.

If you think about it, that's really what we are doing with the sale of our building. Yes, it makes sense financially.

But we are also giving up a big resource, our building, for the good of the kingdom. We are handing the mission and ministry of our building on to those who are in a position to do what we no longer can. As Jesus handed off his ministry to his disciples, so too are we handing on our ministry to our fellow followers of Jesus.

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The story is told that Peter Bernadone wanted to pass along his business empire to his two sons, Francis and Angelo. But, Francis – after lavish youthful indiscretion – became increasingly dissatisfied with his life. Business did not capture his imagination and hedonism did not capture his heart.

Instead, he began to divest – giving generously to the poor. And eventually, believing that he was following the will of God, he took his inheritance and some of his father’s wealth and began a project to restore the crumbling chapel in San Damiano, Italy.

When Peter Bernadone learned that Francis was squandering the family estate he dragged him home, beat him, and chained him in the basement until he came to his senses.

But, when his father was gone, Francis convinced his mother to release him and he returned to San Damiano to continue his mission. Of course, when Bernadone returned, he was enraged and he appealed to the Bishop to intervene – because surely the church wouldn’t condone this abuse of wealth.

At a hearing before the Bishop, Bernadone recited his litany of complaints. The Bishop turned to Francis for his response. But Francis withdrew to a room in the Bishop’s palace, disrobed, folded his clothes into a neat pile and returned to the piazza – completely naked.

He walked up to his father, handed him the clothes with a bag of money on top, and announced:

Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Until now, I have called Peter Bernadone my father. But, because I have proposed to serve God, I return the money and all the clothing that is his, wanting to say that from now on, “My Father who is in heaven,” and not “My father Peter Bernadone...”

And with that Bernadone stormed home and

Saint Francis of Assisi pursued a life without bag, bread, or money belt in service to God.¹

¹ Thanks to Rev. Roger Nelson for this telling of St. Francis’s story.

Of course, we can't all be St. Francis, traveling through life nearly possessionless.

But we can work to travel with *less*,
so that we can trust in God *more*.

We can trust less in our possessions,
In our way of doing things,
In our opinions and ideas,

And trust more in the ONE who sends us out,

To heal,

and repair,

and restore, and deliver from suffering.

To be the kingdom of God to the hurting and the hopeless.

For in our human weakness and powerlessness, and possessionless,
We know that we bear God's power to heal and mend our broken and suffering world.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.