

4 Pentecost, Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20
Christ and Grace July 7, 2019
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Are you someone who likes to keep things or get rid of things? The church can sometimes become a storage unit for lots of things, whether they are treasures or things that members can't quite bear to give up from their own homes – so they bring them to church. And oh, the church kitchen! Because we are a community we take great care in not offending others – so we hesitate to throw away anything in the kitchen that is not our own. What goes into the church refrigerator stays in the church refrigerator! Until the day comes when some brave soul (and I'm not going to name names here but I am thankful for this person) decides it's time to clean out the fridge.

Letting go of things is hard to do. Whether it's food in the fridge, too much stuff stored in the attic, or long-held attitudes and behaviors, we can all probably benefit from a little letting go of things. I went through this just recently when we emptied out kitchen in preparation for the great remodeling project. I thought I was organized, I thought I had what I needed and only what I needed. But the number of boxes we hauled to Goodwill astounded me. We even found a few treasures we had forgotten we owned – they had been pushed into the dark corners of high cabinets, made useless simply because we could not see them. We couldn't see them simply because we had too much other stuff.

It took time and energy to be intentional, and honest, about what we needed to keep, and what we had not really used in years that we needed to put in the discard box. Letting go is hard, grieving is work, even for things in our kitchen. Memories surfaced of our children drinking milk from the collection of Welches jelly jar glasses, memories of all the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches cut into squares or triangles and served on melamine plates decorated with Disney characters. There were sippy cups with chewed up spouts, Peter Rabbit dishes, dinosaur mugs. But it was time to let go of most of these things, time to embrace the new. We never expected that the act of cleaning out our kitchen would be such a great exercise in reflection and letting go, in trusting and moving forward.

In a similar way, today's Gospel shows us how Jesus moves his followers through a similar life changing experience. The Lord appointed seventy others, to go out in pairs to every place he himself intended to go. Is there any place you can think of in *your* life that the Lord does *not* intend to go? Or maybe the better question is, would you let Jesus see the state of your closet, your attic, your heart? What needs to go in your discard box that has been hiding the gifts you have?

But what really caught my attention in this passage is that Jesus sends them out into the midst of the wolves with practically nothing. In fact, they are to set out on this journey without packing. It's like a first century edition of "What Not to Pack". Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals. Oh Jesus, this is a hard saying for the ladies!

I can empathize with the seventy followers, having recently packed one regulation size suitcase for my flight to St. Louis. I mean, purses, bags and sandals take up a lot of room in a suitcase! When we are packing for a trip we make lists; we deliberate over whether we have packed too

much or not enough. Then we have to lug that heavy suitcase through the airport, or pay an additional fee to have it loaded on the plane. And what if our luggage gets lost? So much to worry about!

What a novel idea to approach a trip, or an adventure, or the future with the focus placed on what *not* to pack, rather than what we think we need to pack. It goes against all our common sense. Why do you suppose Jesus was so specific about what not to pack? My experience in the airport confirms over and over that the less we take, the easier it is to move through the check points, to move along on the journey, to actually get where we are going.

And it's not just the suitcases, the kitchen clutter, or the stuff in the attic, not just material goods that hinder us. What about our love of comfort or predictability? Sometimes our baggage can be our need to be in control of things, or our fear of the future. We carry around the baggage of things done and left undone, things unforgiven, goals never met, memories never made.

In the church we pack our bags with the mantra that we have always done it that way, or our concerns that Sunday attendance is down or our pledges are decreasing. It's a lot of luggage to lug around and it just might be keeping us from seeing what God wants to show us next. It might be hiding gifts that have been made useless because we cannot see them. How comfortable are we in allowing Jesus to clean out the entire contents of our kitchens and closets, our personal lives and our church lives, both literally and metaphorically?

The truth is, *all* that stuff weighs us down, slows our journey, consumes our time and resources, and creates a need for security just to protect all our stuff, and it guards a way of being the church that is no longer working for us in the 21st century. It all distracts us from the journey; it keeps us from seeing possibility on the horizon. It gets in the way of our relationship with Jesus. As followers of Christ, as disciples sent out on a mission, we are called to set aside our personal packing lists and excess baggage. We are called to trust that the One we follow will meet our needs, will provide in ways that far surpass anything we can ask or imagine.

So if we are not to pack before we set out on this journey, if we are to go out trusting God and making ourselves vulnerable, then how do we proclaim the Gospel in a world where there are too many dusty places that have no peace, places that might not welcome us or our efforts?

You see that's just it. There is nothing that we can pack for this journey. All that we need to have with us is Jesus - what we know of Jesus, and what we remember that Jesus did. We know that Jesus loved and cared for people along the way. And we saw how he did that - reaching out to those cast aside by society, healing the sick, feeding the hungry. And he did these things trusting God to provide. God's provision will be seen in the new gifts discovered in places where we least expect them. Jesus and the disciples did not do mission work with a tractor-trailer full of stuff rolling along behind them. What they received, they shared. We can do this! We can follow Jesus this week as we feed the hungry at the Hope Center. We can sign up to provide lunches for youth volunteering to help the needy at the Tri-Cities Work Camp. There is always something waiting- the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

The kingdom of God has come near. What is it that God is calling you to leave behind? We are being sent out like lambs into the midst of wolves. That's always been the case as we live as Christians in this world. But we are not alone because the kingdom of God has come near and we are filled with and surrounded by peace. As individuals, as a parish, and as the church at large, it is this peace that will empower us to trust in God's provision as we move forward to share the good news with a world waiting to hear it; waiting to share their gifts with us. Amen.