

**“The Packing List”**

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Mark 6:1-13

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. <sup>2</sup> On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! <sup>3</sup> Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.

<sup>4</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” <sup>5</sup> And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. <sup>6</sup> And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. <sup>7</sup> He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. <sup>8</sup> He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; <sup>9</sup> but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics.

<sup>10</sup> He said to them,

“Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. <sup>11</sup> If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.”

<sup>12</sup> So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent.

<sup>13</sup> They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

## THE PACKING LIST

When we go on a trip we create a packing list.  
We don't want to forget the essentials: toothbrush, shaver, pants, shirts, socks...

Better take all those medicines...just in case.

Which shoes will I need?  
Maybe I should take an extra pair for Sunday worship.

How about some exercise clothes and some sneakers?

What will the weather be like?  
Warm the first part of the week and then it'll get cooler later.

I better pack accordingly.

That means packing twice as much as you know.

And then there's the gifts that we're taking.  
We need to pack some food to eat while we're stuck in traffic.

Maybe I'll pack my guitar.  
Can't go for a whole week without music can we?

You get the idea.  
Before long even a rather large SUV is filled to overflowing.

And since they tell you not to leave anything in the car at a motel, all that stuff that you bring has to come inside the motel for the night.

So, you load up the cart and tote it inside.  
And then the next morning you load it all up again.  
And tote that stuff to the car.

That can be particularly challenging when the elevator at the hotel is out of service!

I don't know about your family.

But, my family doesn't travel light.  
We seem to take it all wherever we go.

## TRAVELING LIGHT

I thought about our recent vacation when I read today's Scripture lesson.  
Part of it sounds a lot like a packing list.

But, this list is different.  
Instead of including everything,  
this list seems to exclude almost everything.

Jesus is sending his disciples on a mission trip.  
And what are they to take?  
It might be easier to say what they won't take.

No money. No bread. No nothing.  
Just a staff, one pair of sandals, one or maybe two tunics and a simple  
message:

"Repent.  
The kingdom of God is at hand."

Travel light.  
Ministry is hindered when we take too much stuff with us.

## NAZARETH

This travel light lesson for today  
begins with Jesus in his hometown, Nazareth.  
Up until now, Jesus' ministry had been going really well.

His preaching had drawn large crowds.  
He had healed many of their diseases.  
He had liberated many from their demons.

And he had done this on both sides of the Sea of Galilee, in Jewish and  
Gentile country.

So, now he comes home.

And you would think  
that he would come home to a hero's welcome.

He went to the synagogue and started preaching.  
It was quite the sermon.  
People said,

"This guy is so smart.  
Such power and wisdom.  
He must have gone to a great school."

But, then they notice.  
He looks familiar.

"Why, that's Mary and Joseph's boy.  
His brothers and sisters are still here with us.

They're carpenters,  
not teachers or prophets.

Who does this boy think he is  
...standing up in the synagogue  
and preaching to us?"

We don't need to hear any sermons from a carpenter!

And at that point,  
Jesus was rejected by his own people.  
"They took offense at him."

## DIDN'T RECOGNIZE THE SON OF GOD

Their problem was the same problem that runs throughout the gospel of Mark.  
Nobody really knew who Jesus was.

They recognized Jesus in Nazareth.  
He was, after all, in his home town,  
but they really didn't know him.

He wasn't the carpenter's son.  
He was the Son of God.

That's where he got the ability to preach and heal  
and forgive sins and command the wind and the waves.

The Son of God had been living among them all those years.

But, they didn't recognize him.

We shouldn't be too hard on the folks at Nazareth.  
The Son of God is still at work in our home town.  
The Spirit of God in Christ is still active and alive.

After all, he has risen. Right?  
But, sometimes we don't recognize him.

In fact, sometimes we too even take offense at what Jesus is saying and doing.

You see, the message and mission of Jesus often doesn't fit with what we believe.  
And that can cause conflict.

## NO FAITH, FEW MIRACLES

So, what's a Messiah to do in a case like this?  
What's a Messiah to do when he's rejected by his own people?

Jesus said, "Prophets are not without honor,  
except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house."

This is one of the few times in Mark's gospel where Jesus is *not* portrayed as a powerful miracle worker. In fact, due to their lack of faith, his ministry in Nazareth is largely a failure.

Just a few people cured.  
No deeds of power.

And instead of the people being amazed at Jesus, now it's Jesus' turn to be amazed at the people.

He was amazed by their lack of faith.

When the people who know us best lose faith in us, it can really be discouraging.  
We can't do as much,

And if we dwell on that rejection, ...well, we can get stuck emotionally.

## MOVING ON

Most of us have experienced this kind of rejection. And when that happens, the question for us this:

Are we going to stay in Nazareth, that place of rejection? Or are we going to move on?

Jesus chose to move on.

Jesus told his disciples to travel light. And Jesus practiced what he preached.

He left the burden of a failed ministry in Nazareth and moved on down the road.

He left Nazareth and went to other villages proclaiming the good news, healing the sick, casting out demons.

## JOY ROBBING BAGGAGE

These days there are others who encourage us to travel light.

The minimalists tell us if we haven't used something in the past 13 months, or if something doesn't bring us joy, we should get rid of it.

They have a point.

A lot of us travel heavy.  
We have too much stuff, and it slows us down.  
Our stuff can even make us unhappy.

But, the worst burdens are emotional.

We all have emotional baggage.  
We keep replaying in our mind those times that we were rejected.

We may leave our Nazareth, our place of rejection,  
but we carry Nazareth with us in our hearts.

### SHAKE THE DUST OFF YOUR FEET

When Jesus sent his disciples out on a mission trip,  
he knew this might be a problem.

Inevitably the disciples would come to a town where the message would be  
rejected,  
as Jesus was rejected.

The people would say that the good news was just too good to be true.  
And when there is no faith, nothing much happens.  
It could be very discouraging.

What should they do?  
In a way Jesus' advice is still the same.  
Travel light.

They should travel light in terms of possessions,  
and they should travel light emotionally.

“Let go of rejection and failure,  
and go on to another village.

And shake the dust off your feet as you leave town.”

This symbolic gesture was a word of warning to those that rejected the  
good news.

But, I wonder if this was also a way to keep the disciples emotionally centered.

“Don’t carry around the baggage of rejection.  
Shake the dust off your feet and move on.”

Don’t worry about the outcome.  
Don’t carry grudges.  
Let go of any need for retribution.

Don’t give in to fear, or anger or discouragement.

It’s hard to leave that emotional baggage.  
But, we must if we are to move forward.

## REJECTION AND FRUSTRATION

If you’re going to do ministry, you are going to fail.  
The message you bring will be rejected at times.  
It can hurt.

Sometimes the rejection can be due to the fact  
that we preach the gospel in a way that can’t be easily be understood by  
those who haven’t heard it before.

At the fourth of July celebration, there was guy walking up and down the  
lakefront with a sign.  
He looked really nervous. I thought that maybe this was the first time he  
had tried this.

The sign had a Bible verse suggesting that Jesus was the only way to sal-  
vation.  
And he was followed by a lady who gave me a gospel tract.

I took the tract and read it.  
Nothing wrong with it.

But, the tract did use biblical terms that I suspect a seeker wouldn’t under-  
stand.  
And gospel tracts by their very nature leave too much out.

I'm sure their efforts were met with rejection and even hostility in some cases.

And I wondered if their enthusiasm might be so dampened by this experience that they wouldn't even try to proclaim the gospel any more.

I know it's happened to me from time to time.  
My clumsy, half informed efforts to preach the gospel came up empty.

And I got very discouraged.

I still get discouraged from time to time  
because I know that I'm not the kind of disciple that I should be.

Despite all my years of training and experience, I  
can still be awkward and unsure in the way I express the faith.

From time to time I let emotional baggage get the best of me.

How about you?

Are you having trouble letting go of your emotional baggage?  
Is your suitcase filled with things like cynicism, contempt, anger or despair?

Or maybe you're just worn out by the journey.  
When you look at the world and overwhelming evil, do you say with the philosopher,

"History teaches us that people do not learn from history"?

Jesus tells us as he told disciples long ago,

"Travel light. Don't carry too much stuff.  
And especially lighten that emotional baggage."

## JESUS REJECTED AND VICTORIOUS

The Bible tells us that disciples are not greater than their masters. Jesus was rejected, questioned, judged and persecuted.

And this even happened in his own home town.

So he just did what he could and moved on to another place.

Rejection did not make Jesus quit.

He kept on preaching.

He kept on healing.

He kept on casting out demons.

He continued to confront evil.

He challenged those who oppressed the people.

He took the side of those who suffered.

Quite often Jesus was met with fierce opposition.

The powers that be do not like to be challenged...

...not then and not now.

And that opposition finally led to a cross.

But, like a seed that "dies" in the ground and is reborn in a new way, so the ministry of Jesus was reborn despite the ferocity of his enemies.

The resurrection created a community that was even stronger.

And the message spread even farther.

## THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION

The cross and resurrection should provide a template for our life.

Things do not always go as planned.

Sometimes nothing is happening in our ministry.

The death dealing forces seem to be winning.

But, God is still at work.

When it comes to ministry, it is God who gives the growth. We are merely spreading the seed.

As I look back on my life,  
I've come to realize that it's not about me and my faith. It's about the  
power of the gospel and the Savior who proclaims it.

I'm merely spreading the seed.  
God gives the growth.

I have seen the power of the gospel bring hope and comfort to people in  
spite of my many shortcomings.

And that keeps me moving...  
to the next town,  
the next opportunity,  
the next person.

Who knows what God may do?  
Who knows how the power of God's grace might change the world?

I have come to embrace the mystery  
and the hope of God's future.

And that leads me on.

## MINISTRY DONE BY THE UNPREPARED

Notice what happened with the disciples.  
They are sent out with few supplies and very little training.

Throughout the gospel of Mark it's very clear.  
The disciples didn't really know much about Jesus  
and the kingdom of God that he proclaimed.

But, despite that lack of knowledge and meager resources, the results are  
surprisingly good.

The Bible tells us that they were able to cast out many demons. And they  
were able to heal many who were sick.

Not a bad result for fishermen and tax collectors who hadn't been to semi-  
nary or medical school!

How were the disciples able to do so much good?  
They were so unprepared.

## TWO THINGS THAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE

Actually we haven't talked about two things that the disciples did take with them on this trip that really did make a difference.

First, they took another person.  
The Bible tells us that Jesus sent them out two by two.

And second they took authority.  
Jesus gave them authority over the unclean spirits.

I can see a parallel for our journey of faith.  
We travel light, but we always have each other.

The community of faith offers support and comfort when we stumble. The community of faith reminds us who we are and whose we are.

And we are given authority over unclean spirits.

Don't misunderstand.  
I'm not saying that we become junior exorcists!

The unclean spirits we face are much more frightening and powerful than individual demon possession.

We do battle against what the apostle Paul called in his letter to the Ephesians, the "principalities and the powers".

The NRSV translation makes the meaning clear of this verse clear.

"..our struggle is not against the enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12)

Here's some examples of those principalities and powers ripped from the newspaper headlines.

The unclean spirits we face are:

... a world where lies are spoken as truth.  
...a world where the weak are exploited  
by the rich and powerful.  
...a world where life is cheap  
and hope is in short supply.

Amazing how today's world,  
despite our technological advancements,  
is not all that different from the ancient world in which Jesus lived.

And that's why the words of Jesus are still powerful.

His admonition to care for the least and the lost,  
his words of grace and forgiveness are still relevant.

His words of judgement against those who use politics and religion as a  
way to oppress the people still carry much weight.

Jesus gives us authority over those unclean spirits.

When we speak the words of Jesus in a hostile world, the unclean spirits  
tremble.

Our job in the church is to remind each other of Jesus' words and leave ev-  
erything else behind.

God in Christ still calls disciples to go into the world with his message. The  
kingdom of God is at hand.

But, God still lightens our load as we make that trip. God still reduces our  
packing list.

You have all you need.  
You have the authoritative words of Jesus.  
Go and speak a word of hope in his name.

Amen.