**Packing Light**

Ezekiel 2:1-5
Mark 6:1-13

 The couple who I met backpacking on Isle Royale would have been well advised to take a cue from Jesus about how much to bring with on their trip. For those unfamiliar with Isle Royale, it is an Island in Lake Superior, a designated national park, without roads, primarily used by backpackers. I met the couple as they arrived at the camp site where I was staying. It was about a four mile hike from where the boat let us off, which is quite doable for the average backpacker.

He arrived at the camp site looking exhausted. I found this odd since he looked to be in good shape and was younger than me. Turns out it was his first time backpacking. He wanted to impress his girl friend so he brought everything he could think of that might make for a perfect trip. I watched as he unpacked. The first thing he pulled out of his bag was a two burner Coleman stove. The stove was followed by a 16 oz. can of Dinty Moore Beef Stew, a full bottle of tang, a full jar of peanut butter, a full jar of jelly, a full jar of coffee, a large container of maple syrup, the list goes, sparing nothing. The last items that he pulled out were two bottles of wine. I am guessing that back pack weighed well over 80 pounds. It was their plan to do a loop around part of the Island. It was clear they had traveled as far as they were going to go.

 If you have flown in the last few years, you know that airlines are getting a lot stricter about the size and weight of carryon bags. It was recently reported that some airlines are even considering a reduction in size and weight of the bags that are presently allowed. In our Scripture lesson this morning, Jesus would have made those airlines look generous with their carry on allotment. According to Mark, Jesus says to the disciples take nothing for your journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in your belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. Delta would be pleased. My new backpacking friend could have avoided ending his trip at the first camping site they encountered if he had taken a cue from Jesus, who clearly sees value in traveling light.

 Jesus, of course, has no particular interest in the profitability of airlines. Jesus does have an interest in disciples continuing on the journey of proclaiming God’s Realm, without giving up in exhaustion at the very first place offering the promise of rest. The charge Jesus gives to the disciples is the charge given to everyone who believes in the redemptive love and justice of God’s Realm, which Jesus proclaims and for which he dies. Go out and tell the people to repent of everything standing in the way of God’s love. Cast out the demonic forces that do so much harm in our world. Offer healing to all those in need. This is no small charge.

Jesus knows that if we are to be effective, if we are to avoid giving up and stopping at the very first place offering rest, then we need to travel light. “Take nothing for your journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in your belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics”. It would, of course, be a major mistake of fundamentalist proportion if we conclude Jesus intends this list of items on the prohibited list to be complete, rather than suggestive. Yes, there are those pictures with lines drawn through them, reminding us food, those convenient suit cases with four wheels, money belts, and extra coats must all be left behind, but they are only examples of what Jesus means by traveling light.

It is no coincidence that these traveling light instructions by Jesus to the disciples comes on the heels of a rather unpleasant experience in his home town of Nazareth. Jesus has been growing in reputation. Word of his courage in speaking about injustice, offering healing to those in need, promise of new life, the power of his preaching has been spreading. The crowds have been getting larger and larger.

It would be reasonable to expect that when Jesus returns to his home town of Nazareth, Jesus would be a source of hometown pride. Quite the opposite occurs. People remember the scrawny kid who had no interest in football, baseball, or any of the popular sports. “You mean that boy with the masking tape on his broken glasses, who kept asking all those annoying questions is now someone in the news? He is nothing more than the son of a low wage carpenter. His mom, brothers and sisters, all live on the next street in that tiny house”. The people actually take offense at the message and the healing Jesus offers. Anyone wondering if Jesus feels hurt by the rejection of these people with whom he has grown up, knows exactly how Jesus feels when he says, “prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own home.”

What does it mean to travel light? For Jesus it means refusing to let the wounds and hurts he experiences in the town where he grew up, deter him from proclaiming and living out the love of God. It is baggage that Jesus is prepared to leave behind. All of us have this emotional stuff we carry with us, wounds and hurts of the past. Childhood often comes with its unique disappointments, heartaches and losses. This past week Ramsey County Commissioner Jim McDonough filed suit against the Boy Scouts of America for failing to protect him from sexual abuse as a child. “In an emotional news conference at his attorney’s office in Minneapolis, McDonough said the abuse, which happened from when he was 12 to 16, killed his desire to go to college and launched him into years of self-destructive behavior that finally ended with counseling in the 1980s”. For McDonough putting down this baggage, which he had carried for so many years, begins with telling the truth about the abuse he suffered.

All of us know how easy it is to pick up and carry with us things that we find hurtful. Pastors are especially prone to picking up and carrying with this type of baggage. Ten people can leave church saying something positive about the sermon and what it meant. One person comes by and says, “Well, I guess you ran out of time on the old sermon preparation this week.” Guess what we pick up and carry with us the rest of the day, maybe into the next week. We all do it, rehearsing in our minds those things people say that trouble us. “Shake off the dust from your feet”, says Jesus. “Let it go. Leave it behind. Travel light”. Like my back packing friend, extra baggage weigh us down and stand in the way of this journey of love and justice Jesus invites us to live.

Perhaps you saw the huge disappointment this week of Laura Basset during England’s Women’s World Cup playoff match with Japan. The New York Times reports “It was a soccer player’s worst nightmare. With seconds left in a World Cup semifinal on Wednesday, Laura Bassett of England lunged for the ball and accidentally [kicked it into her own net](http://www.fifa.com/womensworldcup/videos/highlights/match%3D300269504/index.html). Seconds later, the whistle blew. Japan had won, 2-1, and Bassett and many other England players were left in tears”. None of us will ever play World Cup soccer, but all of us have faced big losses and disappointments that can, if we let them, become part of the baggage we carry with us, like a full can of Dinty Moore Beef Stew or full jar of Tang. Travel light” says Jesus. “Let it go. Leave it behind”.

In Atlanta, our confirmation group spent a week working with young African American children. We know that there is a tremendous amount of stuff we need to name and ultimately let go of when it comes to race relations in this country. The confederate flag is clearly one, but we have our own baggage here. In Minnesota people have been drawing attention to the fact that Lake Calhoun is named after John Calhoun, a former Secretary of War and Vice President who argued slavery was a positive good for those enslaved. Our county of Ramsey is named after a Governor who was a leader of genocide against the Dakota people. Our confirmands had a great week with the children with whom they worked, but there is no escaping the reality that those of us who are white carry cultural baggage bogging us down and keeping us from fully living the way of justice Jesus would have us proclaim. Travel light” says Jesus. “Let it go. Leave it behind”.

None of this is easy, but who said following the way of Jesus is meant to be easy. On this weekend when we celebrate the spirit of independence, Jesus invites us to be free of all those things standing in the way of God’s love and justice being realized in our lives and world.

On our last full day in Atlanta our confirmation group was given the assignment of helping out in a local food pantry. There were close to 100 people waiting for food, with about half of them being homeless. It turns out the Food Pantry organizers were seriously understaffed and very much in need of volunteers. Our youth were given roles that ordinarily would be reserved for adults, which included registering guests and taking their food orders. All of our youth rose to the challenge and did exceptionally well. Later I shared with our confirmands that they had been given authority that is seldom given to youth.

We too often underestimate the capacity not only of our youth, but also of ourselves to make a difference in our world. To all those who follow the way of Jesus, traveling light, Jesus says, I give you authority to proclaim repentance, speaking up for justice. I give you authority to heal the sick. I give you authority to offer forgiveness. I give you authority to be voices for peace. I give you authority to care for this earth. I give you authority to help build the Realm of God on earth.

My backpacking companions lugged their heavy load to the first place they found they could rest and it was as far as they would go. Jesus sends us out into this world set free from all that keeps us bogged down, authorized to continue the journey, sharing and proclaiming the love of God.

**Ezekiel 2:1-5**

*In our first lesson the prophet Ezekiel remembers the calling he has received from God. The prophet is told he should be under no illusion that the message of God’s love and justice will always be well received. But, when the prophet is faithful people will know that the word of God has been in their midst.*

He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, "Thus says the Lord God." Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.

**Mark 6:1-13**

*In our Gospel lesson today, Mark tells the story of the rejection Jesus experiences in his hometown of Nazareth. Perhaps because of the rejection, Jesus knows it is time the message of God’s love and justice must be shared by the disciples. Jesus instructs them to travel light and gives them the authority over all the unclean spirits in our world standing in the way of the Realm of God for which we pray.*

He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. 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! 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. Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 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." So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.