

**Sermon for 7-8-18**  
**Scriptures: Mark 6:1-13 & 2 Corinthians 12:2-10**  
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My family and I just returned from a week in North Carolina, which is where I grew up and where my parents and sisters still live. We had a wonderful visit; it was good for me to have that precious time with family and friends. During the nine years that we've lived in Ohio, I've always looked forward to these trips home, but the one aspect I dread is the preparation -- specifically, the packing.

As my husband can attest, I am not a good packer. I procrastinate, so I wait until bedtime the night before we're leaving (or even the morning of our departure) to pack, and then I'm in such a hurry that I overpack, including far more than I really need, while also inevitably leaving behind one or more important items. So for my week in NC, I took five pairs of shoes, but no toothbrush! My parents had extras, so it worked out just fine.

I've always been a poor packer, and at this point in life, I suspect I always will be. The only thing that helps is making a packing list ahead of time and forcing myself to stick to it... easier said than done. My packing lists are never as simple and streamlined as the one in today's Gospel reading!

After Jesus is belittled and rejected by the people in his hometown, he turns his focus outward, sending his disciples two-by-two to spread the Good News in the surrounding villages. He prepares them with some brief instructions, and a packing list. They are to wear one tunic and a pair of sandals, and take only a staff for walking. No money, no food, no extra supplies.

It's a pretty short packing list, right? I wonder how any of us would feel if we were in the disciples' shoes (no pun intended), if we were being sent out on a challenging journey to an unfamiliar place, with no supplies but a walking stick, the clothes on our back and the sandals on our feet... for many of us,

it's hard to imagine spending a day away from home without our smartphones and our tablets, never mind our wallets! And I don't know about you, but I always have at least one protein bar in my purse, along with a pack or two of fruit snacks, maybe a box of raisins, some bandaids, sugar-free gum, kleenex, hand sanitizer, lotion, some Advil, a small hairbrush and some barrettes, and usually a water bottle.

Do I need all those things at every moment? No. But if I don't have them, I feel unsafe, unprepared, and uncomfortable. The very idea fills my mind with "What ifs".... What if I get hungry and there's nothing I can eat? What if my breath smells, or my nose runs, or I get a headache, or my hands get dirty and there's no bathroom nearby, or my hair goes all frizzy? What if I need something that I don't have with me, what will I do?

Well, the truth is, I would do what any of us would do in such a situation. I would have to ask for help. I would have to approach another human being and ask for what I needed -- water, or a tissue, or an advil. Without my wallet, I would have no money to offer in exchange for whatever I needed, so I would be asking for favors without compensation. I would have to rely on the kindness and generosity of other people, maybe even (gasp) strangers, to fulfill my needs. I would be at the mercy of others. I would be vulnerable.

Vulnerability is what Jesus asks of his disciples. He sends them out with a mission and a message -- a message he knows will raise eyebrows and stir things up -- and nothing else. He asks them to rely on the generosity of strangers, to put themselves 'out there' and make themselves vulnerable to rejection and refusal and unkindness. They will travel to cities and villages they've never seen and hope to be fed and housed and welcomed; they will ask for what they need, only what they need, and they may be denied. They will have to take the chance.

Other contemporary accounts from the Holy Land tell us that traveling missionaries were not uncommon. Any person who had a spiritual message to share could take the same chance the disciples were taking and walk from

village to village to speak with anyone who might listen. In fact, there were so many of these traveling missionary types wandering around that it sometimes presented a burden on modest communities. And, just like today's priests and pastors and televangelists, not all of them were honest, God-fearing folk. Some of them were 'in it' for pride and self-gain. The Didache, a first-century record of the worship practices and lifestyle of the earliest Christians, sets out guidance for how to handle these visitors: "Let every apostle, when he cometh to you, be received as the Lord; but he shall not abide more than a single day, or if there be need, a second likewise; but if he abide three days, he is a false prophet. And when he departeth let the apostle receive nothing save bread, ....but if he ask money, he is a false prophet."<sup>i</sup>

I'm tempted to go into a tangent here about the preacher in New Orleans who recently asked his flock to give more money so that he could buy a \$54 million private jet<sup>ii</sup>... but there's no point. I suspect we all feel the same way about those wealthy megachurch types with their extravagant lifestyles. And besides, it's too easy to stand here in my glass house (or glass pulpit?) and throw stones at others. That's not what Jesus asks of me, or any of us.

What if we turn our judgmental gaze inward? Where are the places in my life, in all our lives, where we hoard resources, where we stockpile, where we convince ourselves that we *need* certain things that we know are luxuries for so many others? What would it look like to live more simply, and openly, and vulnerably?

Jesus sent his disciples out to do holy work, the most important work -- healing the sick, casting out demons, proclaiming the way of the Lord -- and he sent them with next to nothing. No financial security, no backpacks full of supplies, no guarantees. They had to depend on each other, and on the kindness and hospitality of strangers.

And why did Jesus do this? Was it out of necessity, because they couldn't afford basic supplies? No; Jesus and his followers certainly weren't wealthy, but they weren't so impoverished that they couldn't buy bread. Was it

amusing for Jesus, to send the disciples out with nothing and see who could make it the longest? Of course not; this was important work, as we said, and Jesus was never cruel.

Jesus sends his friends out with nothing, because he knows what many of us do our best to ignore or forget... that we must become vulnerable before we can know real human connection, and we cannot fully trust in God while also trusting in our own resources. The holy posture of vulnerability with humility -- that's what Jesus wants the disciples, and us, to experience and live into.

The Apostle Paul, in this morning's reading from 2 Corinthians, writes that the Lord spoke to him and said this: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."<sup>iii</sup>

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

What if we lived like we actually believed that?

Our most important earthly resources, the things we should be tending and cultivating, are our relationships with other people -- the ones we know best, friends and family and neighbors, and the ones we don't know and perhaps even fear, strangers. Those strangers are, after all, made in the image of God.

When we open up, and make ourselves just the slightest bit vulnerable to others, we are taking a chance; but it's a chance Jesus asks us to take, and its reward is a glimpse of what it means to dwell in the kingdom of God, where we love and trust and depend on one another without fear and without suspicion.

If it sounds silly or foolish in our culture that worships individual wealth and power and strength, so be it. Vulnerability and humility, simplicity and interdependence are the way of the Gospel. This is what Jesus expects of his

disciples -- that they place their trust in God's grace and in each other, nothing else.

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

My prayer today, for myself and for all of us, is that the Spirit might give us the wisdom and inner strength to recognize how much trust we place in our personal earthly resources, and help us move ever closer towards that holy dependence upon God's grace. May we be open and vulnerable to each other and to the eternal love and goodness of our Maker. **Amen.**

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<sup>i</sup> Didache 11:4-9, see [montreal.anglican.org/comments/bpr14l.shtml?](http://montreal.anglican.org/comments/bpr14l.shtml?)

<sup>ii</sup> <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/05/televangelist-jesse-duplantis-asks-for-donations-for-private-jet.html>

<sup>iii</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:9