

2019 07 07 – Emptying our Suitcases

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Jesus sent seventy-two of his disciples on ahead to every town and place he intended to visit. Jesus' followers were heading off to do his work in the world. They were going to heal the sick and to share the good news of God's reign of love and peace and justice. They were starting on a trip to places unknown.

How many of you are heading off on a trip, or trips, this summer? (*wait for hands*) Trips take a lot of planning don't they! You have to decide where you're going, how you are going to get there, what you are going to do and finally you have to decide what you are going to take with you.

I brought with me today a suitcase filled with some of the items that I usually take on a trip. (*start taking out some items – jacket, toiletries bag, shoes*) I have to confess that I am not necessarily a light packer. It is my tendency to take nearly every piece of clothing that I own because I like to be ready for every possibility! Who knows, we could have a sudden a dip in temperature in the middle of July and my fleece sweater (*pull it out*) might come in handy!

I do find it helpful when someone gives me a list of items that I am allowed to bring. When I was in my thirties and living in Toronto, every summer I would go on a 4 or 5 day canoe trip with a company in Northern Ontario. These trips usually had fairly long portages where we had to carry both our canoes and heavy backpacks so it was important that we minimized our personal belongings.

The company would give us a list telling us exactly how many shorts, pants, jackets, shirts and shoes we were allowed to take. It forced me to choose carefully and to let go of my desire to over pack.

But even so, I would have struggled with the list that Jesus gave his followers. He said, "Don't carry a walking stick or knapsack, wear no sandals." They were not allowed to take anything beyond the clothes they were wearing: no extra tunic, no money, no food, nothing. Jesus' seventy-two disciples took travelling light to the extreme. I'm not suggesting that any of us should empty our suitcases that far, but it's not a bad idea to think about what we can let go of and what we really need to take on this journey of life.

How many of you are familiar with the term "capsule wardrobe?" Well a "capsule wardrobe" is a few essential, often timeless pieces of clothing that every woman or man should have in their wardrobe. If you search the Internet you will find many websites that can't wait to tell you what should be in your capsule wardrobe this season!

Over the summer I want to explore with you what the "capsule wardrobe" might look like for people of faith, for people like you and me. We will be asking ourselves, "After we empty our suitcase of all those things we don't really need, what will be left and what will we need to add? What will our capsule wardrobe look like?"

In Colossians 3:12 the apostle Paul gives a very short list of five items that should be a part of every capsule wardrobe. He suggests that we should clothe ourselves with heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. So this summer we are going to start with Paul's list. Each week we will consider one of these virtues and what it means to wear them, or at least have them with us in our suitcase.

When Jesus sent his followers out with nothing, it was clear that he expected them to depend on others for their food and their lodging. He said,

And whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace be upon this house! ...

Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you for the labourer is worth a wage. Don't keep moving from house to house.

I believe that the first item Jesus was asking his followers to include in their capsule wardrobe was humility. In order to take this mission, they had to let go of their pride and be willing to ask for what they needed.

For some of us that is a very difficult thing to do. We believe we should be self-sufficient – not dependent on others for anything. We should be able to handle every situation ourselves and be prepared for any occurrence – even freezing temperatures in July. But in reality we are all dependent on each other. It doesn't matter how much wealth we gain, how prepared we are, how much insurance we buy, how many degrees we earn or how many skills we master. We are only human and we need each other.

Not only do we need each other, but we also need God. We need the love, the connection, the support that comes from humbling ourselves to that which is both Holy and mysterious.

Before they left on their trip, Jesus warned his seventy-two followers that not every visit would be successful. He put it this way, “If the people of any town you enter don’t welcome you, go into its streets and say, “We shake the dust of this town from our feet as testimony against you.” Part of being humble is recognizing that failure is inevitable. Jesus was making it clear that they shouldn’t let one town’s negative reaction impact their mission. They were to shake off the dust and move on.

He also wanted them to know that the healing and the teaching that they were doing was not something that could be forced on others. It was not something that could be done from a position of fear or power. They were sharing the good news of God’s reign of peace and justice. That kind of message can only be shared in a relationship of mutuality and trust. It can only be understood when accompanied by healing and humility.

Today’s reading ends with the return of the seventy-two disciples. They came back excited by their success saying, “Rabbi, even the demons obey us in your name!” Not only could they heal the sick but some were even able to perform exorcisms. Their pride in their accomplishments was evident, but Jesus quickly put them in their place. He said, “don’t rejoice in the fact that the spirits obey you so much as that your names are inscribed in heaven.” Jesus was pointing out

that the gifts they had been given were from God. Their ability to heal was not theirs alone but the Holy Spirit moving through them.

Next time we pack our suitcase and head out into the world, we need to remember to leave out our pride, our fear of failure, our ego, our need for perfection and, instead, pack our humility.

I want to end with these words from Steve Garnass-Holmes. He writes:

We are sent out: not to convince but to mend.

The grace we bear will always make us odd.

We will know failure and disappointment,

but the Realm we proclaim is at work in us,

healing, transforming, making new and glorious.

The Commonwealth of God has already come near.

Steve Garnaas-Holmes
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