

Sermon † July 4, 2021

Mark 6:1-13

Frank H. Maxwell

What is it about packing for a trip that brings out the worst in people? I don't know how it is in your house, but packing for a vacation can be one of the most difficult tasks imaginable. When our girls were younger, it was a real chore. The credo we seemed to have at our house was: *"If we have it, bring it."*

It really didn't seem to matter what time of the year it was either. Even if we were going somewhere in the middle of July, we'd take along all kinds of winter-type clothing . . . just in case. We'd take along rain gear and boots and swimming suits and games and books. And I know that we took along more medications than either the pharmacy at Walmart or Walgreens dispense in the course of a week . . . just in case.

Now of course, we only used about one-fourth of what we brought with us. But every time we'd stop somewhere, we would bring everything in with us . . . just in case.

And then, when our vacation had come to an end, we would arrive in our driveway and begin the arduous task of unpacking the car. And we would vow that next time we wouldn't bring as much stuff, but, somehow, we always seemed to forget that the next time around.

Have you ever been over prepared for a trip? How do you pack? And what do you take with you? In today's gospel, Jesus instructs his disciples to take nothing for their missionary journeys except a staff. It was time . . . time to get on with the work.

Jesus called to him the twelve and sent them out in pairs . . . two by two. Up to this point the dominant word for Jesus was "come" ("come follow me" . . . "come and I will make you fishers of people") he now added the word "go". To "go" is a natural step after receiving faith —as in—to go and tell others about this wonderful good news. It's a natural progression . . . if something good has happened to you . . . you want others to know.

And he tells them what they may or may not take with them. Just a staff: no bread — no bag — no money. He also gives them instructions regarding their conduct. Don't move around . . . stay put. Get to know your hosts . . . leave only if they're not receptive .

While the charge which Jesus gave cannot be applied directly to our present life situation, he certainly lifts up a wonderful lifestyle model for anyone trying to live as a Christian in this totally different age. Take nothing for the journey except a staff. Jesus knew that people had to eat and needed clothing and shelter . . . but was also aware of the possessiveness of possessions.

We live in this age of "things". Some one has said, "*Unless we learn to do **without** scores of comforts and luxuries we have been taking for granted as part of our birthright, there may not be any civilized society on this continent after another generation.*" Many have allowed themselves to become possessed by their possessions. They spend nearly all of their time and energy taking care of their stuff and working to pay for it. There is precious little time left to do the things we need to do.

We need to consider what it means to travel lighter. Jesus said stay in the same home . . . do not let the desire for comfort take you from your work. Don't bounce around from place to place. This was good advice.

Then he instructed the disciples to establish a strong relationship within one household. Again, this counsel does not apply directly to our life circumstances but it does offer an intriguing image which is made to order for our age.

For the most part, we are a fidgety, antsy lot. We have difficulty staying put for a long period of time. If something is not going our way, we move on. We change jobs at the slightest disagreement, forgetting there will be disagreements in all jobs to come. When it comes to relationships, commitment, for some, has become an obsolete word from the past. We quit one church and move on to the next the moment the pastor/priest says something we don't like—or if the worship time doesn't fit into our busy schedule.

As uncomfortable as it might be, there are those times when we need to see something through . . . to work it out. To, at least, give it our best shot. However, having said all of that, there are those times when we need to shake the dust from our feet and move on. Sometimes it doesn't work. Sometimes we have to move on. This advice is different for different situations, but whatever the case, we hopefully don't move on until we've made an attempt to reconcile our views.

When it comes to sharing our faith, someone has said: "*We Christians are a funny lot. Some of us don't know when to speak up and others when to shut up.*" More often than not, in matters of sharing one's faith, I find that most Christians are tongue-tied. They're afraid to offend others. Many live out their lives without even letting on that their faith is really important. This conveys to non-Christians or skeptics that the conviction of our faith is not really all that important.

The opposite may not be any better—Christians whose commendable zeal is marred by an incredible lack of tact or timing. Instead of speaking "a word in season", they flood us with a torrent of words. There is a difference between witnessing and arguing.

Jesus never expected his disciples to do God's work . . . only their own. Our own work should include "a word in season"—some identification of our beliefs but always respect for the listener. And . . . we can go on in spite of failure . . . shake off the dust and move on.

We have been given some important lessons this morning. Pack light for the journey . . . trusting that there will be those along the way who will provide what you need. Work to establish strong relationships . . . realizing, however, that there may be those times when you find it necessary to move on.

All of us belong to God. We are one body. We are the church in mission in the world.

“He instructed them to take nothing on the journey but a walking stick—with that they went off, preaching the need of repentance, casting out demons and healing the sick.”

