



Traveling Light: Instructions for the Journey

*A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Sean Lanigan
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost~July 8, 2018*

Ezekiel 2:1-5

The Lord 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.

Psalms 123

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| 1 | To you I lift up my eyes, * | 3 | So our eyes look to the Holy One our God, * |
| | to you enthroned in the heavens. | | until God shows us mercy. |
| 2 | As the eyes of servants | 4 | Have mercy upon us, O God, have mercy, * |
| | look to the hand of their masters, * | | for we have had more than enough of contempt, |
| | and the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, | 5 | Too much of the scorn of the indolent rich, * |
| | | | and of the derision of the proud. |

II Corinthians 12:2-10

I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows—was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

Mark 6:1-13

Jesus 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.

It's travel season. High, high travel season. Get-out-of-the-city season. The perfect time to replace baking pavement and stuffy buildings with cool water and shady trees. I know many of you are just returning or just about to leave. Because you...you are travelers. Consummate travelers.

I've never known a group of people who are so passionate about travel and who have the freedom and resources to travel so often.... as you: the people of St. Peter's. You know how to travel, and you travel well.

But I still don't quite have the hang of it. I grew up around homebodies. People who spent summers tending gardens and cooling off in sprinklers or the public pool. Few of my neighbors had ever traveled internationally. Many had never flown at all. Most people I knew traveled via minivan or camper, and usually not very far.

Now, packing for a car trip is a pretty easy thing to do. You basically just bring everything. Or at least, that's how I've always done it. If I could imagine possibly wanting or needing it, I'd toss it into a bag, filling the trunk and backseat to brimming with duffles and totes and crinkly supermarket bags. Every thrifty Midwestern bone in my body hated the idea of having to buy something new if I already had the same thing at home. So like a good homebody, I just brought home along with me, loading all of it right into the car. I'm an expert at the jigsaw puzzle of maximizing trunk space.

Now, this obsession with being prepared, with having exactly what I might need for any situation, has generally served me well. So for a long time, I simply translated my basic habits of packing for driving right into new habits of packing for flying. For example, back when checked luggage was free, I'd often travel with ten or more books, since I couldn't predict what sort of reading mood might strike me or how good a given book might be. And I always had enough clothes for a trip twice as long as the one on which I was actually embarking. I was a classic overpacker.

But when fees were eventually introduced for checked luggage, I had to dramatically re-evaluate my packing and traveling style. I certainly wasn't going to give the airlines any more of my hard-earned money, so I had to find a way to start traveling more lightly.

Now, this was very difficult for me. I felt insecure traveling with less than I might need. And packing began to give me a lot more anxiety. But rather than really change my habits, I just got a lot craftier and a lot more efficient. I learned to fit more in less space. I got better at folding and rolling. I got lots of adorable little containers so I could have 4-to-5 dabs of every toiletry I might ever need. I became adept at packing a small-but-heavy suitcase.

And then...then a couple years ago I hurt my back really badly. Heavy was now out of the question. I had to learn to pack lightly...really lightly, whether I liked it or not. There were no more workarounds. Even if I checked a heavy bag, I couldn't lift it in and out of a car. So I had to learn to minimize and then minimize some more. I had to learn to ask if I could use a host's washing machine, so that I could pack fewer clothes. I had to wear my one pair of scruffy New Balance sneakers everywhere. I had to make do with any reading material I could find. And I could only bring a couple of snacks. No more weeklong supply of trail mix.

I had to learn to trust that people would help me. I had to trust that people would want me to have what I needed. That people might even go out of their way to try to accommodate me. I also had to learn that, more often than not, I really didn't need as much stuff as I thought I would.

And this was all tough learning. Really tough. I don't trust very easily. Especially other people. But also God, if I'm really honest.

And I bet you don't either.

I bet if Jesus told you how little you were allowed to pack for your missionary journey, well, that just might be the final breaking point in your discipleship. Because we simply don't want to have to rely on anyone else. We don't want to risk not having what we need. We want to live in a world that we can fully manage. A world that's under our control.

But this is not the life we've been given. We have been called to be travelers, of a sort. And to be light travelers, at that. Because travelers...sojourners...disciples... must rely upon the goodness of others, and upon the goodness of God.

But it's so hard to learn to rely in these ways—amidst the comforts of home... within our known and often predictable lives.

So Jesus sends us out, without even a bag of provisions to sustain us. Jesus sends us out, to discover that although we won't be welcome everywhere, we will be welcome somewhere. And that learning to be welcomed, learning to be provided for, is a spiritual practice in and of itself. And wherever we're welcomed, of course, we're called to

create community in Jesus' name: a transformative community of deep repentance.

Now repentance...repentance is a really confusing word. My guess is that you probably think of it as a downer. Something to do with confessing your sins, feeling guilty, groveling. But the Greek word that we commonly translate as repentance, the word *metanoia*, is really about something quite different, something much more subtle.¹

Indeed, *metanoia* is much better defined as a transformative change of the heart; as a spiritual conversion; as the process of "taking one's mind beyond and outside of one's habituations." Going beyond and outside of one's habituations.

In some ways, it's a whole lot easier to confess our sins than to transcend our habituations, isn't it? Our habits are like the air we breathe. Always there, basically invisible, and largely unconscious. They run us, rather than us running them. Which means they're not typically something we have much awareness of or access to.

Now, I'm not talking about everyday habits like how you make your coffee or what route you take to work or how you tend to respond to stress. I'm talking about a much deeper sub-stratum of habituation. I'm talking about the deep level of mental habit that we often call worldview. The basics of how you see yourself and others. Your assumptions about how the world works. Your ideas about what life is for.

The mental luggage we all carry around about How Things Are, and why they're that way, and whether or not they could be different—our worldviews.

And when you stop to think about it, for most of us, this is a whole lot of luggage. We've got heaps of ideas about How Things Are and How Things Should Be. And we end up acting largely according to these mental scripts. Yet most of this conditioning is not spiritual conditioning. It's the conditioning of family, of geography, of class, of education. Forms of conditioning that tend to elbow out our deeper and more fundamental identities as children of God and heirs of the Kingdom. So we don't necessarily look at the world with the open-hearted trust that our spiritual identities are meant to bequeath us.

We want to live in more generous, gentle, peaceful, patient, joyful ways. And we try all kinds of things to become these kinds of people.

Yet these qualities, these fruits of the Spirit, still often feel so distant, so otherworldly, so elusive. Why? Well, I think it's because we're carrying so much luggage. And we can't quite seem to put our luggage down. We might not even know we're carrying it. We might not realize that we're pushing a heavy load of assumptions and biases and hopes and fears with us everywhere we go. We haven't quite realized just what a burden all the baggage of our conditioning can be, and how much it can prevent us from claiming the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

As theologian and Bible scholar Walter Brueggemann has posited: the primary spiritual crisis we face in the United States has nothing to do with being liberal or conservative. Rather, "it has everything to do with giving up on the faith and discipline of our Christian baptism and settling for a common, generic American identity that is part patriotism, part consumerism, part violence, and part affluence."²

To unsettle our malformed identities, then, to free our minds from the conditioning of empire, we must also free our bodies. Which is why Jesus tells his disciples to go forth on their mission unencumbered. Indeed, the whole spiritual journey is a continual process of de-habitation, and relinquishing our luggage is just the beginning.

But it's an important beginning, nevertheless. Because loads we carry can be so heavy. And because we are living with so much less freedom than is our God-given birthright and our destiny.

We were created for freedom. We were baptized into freedom. We eat the meal of freedom at this very altar every week. But we don't always act very free. We're already on the journey, but we need just a little more repentance and just a little less luggage.

And maybe, just maybe, with our own hands and hearts a little more free, we might even begin to live toward the hope that one day all God's children shall be free.

Amen.

1 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metanoia_\(theology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metanoia_(theology))

2 <https://randyridenour.net/2017/03/08/brueggemann-on-the-crisis-in-the-church/>