



“Take Nothing for Your Journey”

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Mark 6:1-13

If you want to know what the Gregg girls are into these days you only have to listen to the sounds in our home. You might hear them singing songs by Paul Simon, John Denver, and the Beatles. Or you might hear them attempting to whistle this old tune (Whistle Theme Song). The Greggettes have recently fallen in love with the old black-and-white episodes of The Andy Griffith Show. And I can honestly say I’m okay with this. I remember watching the reruns as a kid and I am enjoying re-watching them now with the girls. One of my favorite episodes is called “The Sermon for Today.” In that episode, Dr. Harrison Everett Breen, a visiting preacher from New York City, delivered a sermon at the local church in Mayberry. Do you remember what the name was of the church in town? Nope, it wasn’t First Baptist or First Methodist. It was called All Souls Church. And this guest preacher gave a homily entitled “What’s Your Hurry?” And in this sermon, he encouraged the members of the Mayberry congregation to “take it easy and slow down.”

Well, Mayberry was already a rather relaxing place to live, but this preacher stressed the need to slow down and enjoy life. He said, “Consider how we live our lives today. Everything is run, run, run. We bolt our breakfast, we scan the headlines, we race to the office. We drive ourselves from morning to night. We have forgotten the meaning of the word relaxation. What has become of the simple pleasures of the past? Who can forget, for example, the old-fashioned band concert at twilight on the village green? The joy, the serenity of just sitting and listening. This is lost to us. And this we should strive to recapture, a simple, innocent pleasure. And so, I say to you dear friends, ‘Relax. Slow down. Take it easy.’”

At this point the preacher’s voice is quiet and soothing and the camera pans to Barney... who is falling to sleep. Some of you are pretty familiar with that experience in church. First his eyes begin to cross, and then his head bobs, until finally his chin hits his chest. At that very moment, Dr. Breen ends his message by shouting, “What’s your hurry?!” And Barney jumps as if he’s ready to hurry out of the church and run for cover.

As they’re leaving the church Barney says, “Wonderful message, Reverend. That’s just one subject you can’t talk enough about. Sin.” Barney seemed to already be pretty relaxed as he slept through the entire sermon. However, the other people in the congregation took his words seriously. You see, after eating a filling meal at Andy’s house, the people of Mayberry took the preacher’s message to heart and decided to spend their entire Sunday working themselves to exhaustion, trying to put together a concert on the village green for the entire town. Aunt Bee and Clara went off to repair the Mayberry Band’s uniforms while Barney and Gomer attempted to rebuild the bandstand with disastrous results. The bandstand ended up falling apart after Gomer used his hammer to try to hit a spider. And Andy went to practice with the band which was awful. As you might imagine, the townspeople spent the next few frantic hours working

feverishly to get to the point where they could actually slow down and listen to a concert. But they finally gave up, worn out and exhausted. The comical point of the show was that it's good to simplify, but you ruin it if you have to work too hard to find the peace you're looking for.

We live in one of the biggest cities in the United States and we definitely live more hectic lives than the good people of Mayberry. We rush around from place to place and seldom take time to notice our surroundings. Our lives are a blur and we don't have time to see the person with the sign on the side of the road at the traffic light. We don't have time to stand at the courthouse and support those being released from jail. We don't have time to say a kind word or listen to someone's story. We don't have time live the simple message of Jesus to love God and to love others. And not unlike the guest preacher from New York City saying "What's your hurry," in our text for today, Jesus gave the disciples another simple message, "take nothing for your journey."

Jesus told the disciples, "Take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic."

Do you know someone who tends to overpack for a trip? I'm what you might call an "over-packer." I pack for the "what ifs." Do any of you do that? Maybe you pack that extra pair of pants, just in case you spill something on your lap at a restaurant? Maybe you pack the extra raincoat because the weather could get messy? Maybe you pack every style of shoe in your closet just in case there are casual events, or formal events, or you need to go hiking, or you need a comfortable pair of tennis shoes? Maybe you bring that whole extra outfit because for some reason you think you will change clothes five times in one day? Well, that's me. It might be a two-day trip and I'll bring my oversized rolling suitcase stuffed until the zipper can barely close. Oh yeah, if my journey is by car, then I love it. I can really overpack. I mean, you can throw anything into your car and you don't have to worry about it fitting in your suitcase. I tend to pack everything, just in case.

We tend to be a "just in case" society, don't we? We have that junk drawer where we throw all those "just in case" things like rubber bands, ink pens, super glue, and the weird pieces and parts left over from the Ikea furniture. We have those "just in case" items in the trunk of our car with blankets, flashlights, flares, and jumper cables. We have the "just in case" extra phone chargers in our house that seem to be stationed in every available power outlet. We have the snacks in our purses and backpacks, just in case we get hungry. We are a "just in case" people.

So, taking nothing for the journey, as Jesus would call us to do today, certainly makes no sense. Surely, we are not called to be vulnerable like the early disciples, right? Surely, we must be prepared for all that life throws at us? Now it is true, of course, that you and I live in a much different time than Jesus and his disciples did. It is also true that perhaps 'hospitality to the stranger' played a significant role in the ancient Middle East, so it was more likely that the disciples' needs were met regardless of what they neglected to pack for themselves. It is also true that the first followers didn't own nearly as much as we do and didn't overpack their suitcases for a weekend trip.

Yet, as we've been moving through the Gospel of Mark on Wednesday nights and in my sermons on Sunday, we have seen that being prepared should've been important to the disciples because Jesus was constantly operating on the edges of society. Jesus had been moving back and forth around the Sea of Galilee, the border between Jewish and Gentile lands. And it is on this border that Jesus sent his disciples, to be vulnerable, to travel light, to invest in the community, to heal and bring wholeness, to fight evil. He sent them into the world with the power of compassion and the power of love, not with imperialism, weapons, aggression, and might. No, Jesus's followers were not simply told to pack lightly, they were commanded to take nothing for their journey. Nothing! But in a world where we are persuaded to hold tightly to our privilege, or our power, or our positions, taking nothing for our journey, as Jesus called his disciples to do, doesn't really make much sense to us today.

But, just like the disciples who followed Jesus back and forth across the borders of Jewish and Gentile land, we must let go of our preconceptions and prejudices that seem to make our feet fatigued and our souls exhausted. We must cross the borders of our lives, knowing that divine love will provide for our needs. Like the young David against the giant Goliath, who entered that battle with no army or sword, only with trust that the God who was always with him would not abandon him now, we too are constantly fighting the giants in our own lives.

When we are on our journeys, we often come across Goliaths, those giants that challenge us, a life-threatening illness, a strained relationship, a terrible circumstance, or a horrible decision that we forced to make. Then also possessions, what we wear, what we drive, what we eat, where we eat, none of that matters or helps when those to whom we are journeying need the closeness of community and the love of the divine. What matters when we are on our journeys, and we come to those benchmarks, those border crossings, those places where we pass into strange lands that are unfamiliar and unwanted, what counts then is hospitality, and grace, and justice, and mercy, and forgiveness.

We must remember that as we let go of all of those things which hinder the power of love in our lives, we are freed to share that love with others. Jesus' disciples had no assurance that they would be welcomed, supported, and cared for. They brought nothing with them that would give them strength over their exhaustion, starvation, and violence. The only thing the followers of Christ took with them was the power of compassion, the power of salvation. They brought with them that same power that Jesus unleashed in the graveyard to heal the demoniac. That same power that Jesus spoke to still the stormy sea. That same power that escaped from Jesus to heal a hemorrhaging woman. That same power that transpired in a touch when Jesus raised a young girl from her deathbed. That power of Jesus in the community of faithful followers, even in impossible circumstances, helped them produce miraculous healings and exorcisms. It was the power of love, working in, with, and through those stumbling, stubborn, self-conscious, still learning disciples, that made Jesus's presence real in the world.

And that is the journey we are on today. We often feel unprepared and unqualified. We feel ill-equipped because we've left all of our equipment behind. But Jesus reminds us that we are the equipment. We are the ones journeying to bring healing to our community. We are the ones journeying to bring divine love to the world. And in order to do this we must keep moving. We must keep going. We must keep growing. We can't bring love on our journey when our pockets

are filled with doubt and greed and selfishness and pride. We can't journey into the margins of the world when we are weighed down and consumed by the heaviness of our complacency. We will ultimately heal people and cast out evil when we step out in faith and take nothing for our journey.

In his talk with youth in Paraguay in July of 2015, the Pope recalled some ideas from St. Ignatius to help these youth decide whether they would be playing on Jesus' team or the Devil's team. Pope Francis said this:

In the Bible, the devil is called the father of lies. What he promises, or better, what he makes you think, is that, if you do certain things, you will be happy. And later, when you think about it, you realize that you weren't happy at all. That you were up against something which, far from giving you happiness, made you feel more empty, even sad. Friends: the devil is a con artist. He makes promises after promise, but he never delivers. He'll never really do anything he says. He doesn't make good on his promises. He makes you want things which he can't give, whether you get them or not. He makes you put your hopes in things which will never make you happy. That's his game, his strategy. He talks a lot, he offers a lot, but he doesn't deliver. He is a con artist because everything he promises us is divisive, it is about comparing ourselves to others, about stepping over them in order to get what we want. He is a con artist because he tells us that we have to abandon our friends, and never to stand by anyone. Everything is based on appearances. He makes you think that your worth depends on how much you possess.

Then we have Jesus, who asks us to play on his team. He doesn't con us, nor does he promise us the world. He doesn't tell us that we will find happiness in wealth, power and pride. Just the opposite. He shows us a different way. This coach tells his players: "Blessed, happy are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake." And he ends up by telling them: "Rejoice, on account of all this!"

As we go about our week, let us dare to drop our luggage and our baggage and our stuff in order to rejoice and to journey with Christ. Dare to go out without two tunics. Dare to leave your money bag and bread behind. Dare to take risks for God without the perfect plan in place. Dare to offer the word of your mouth and the work of your hands to help someone in need. Dare to march in your sandals alongside those fighting for justice. Dare to unload all of your heavy burdens, those things that are collecting dust, at the base of the cross. Dare to journey into unknown and unfamiliar places, trusting that God is already there. Dare to be like Jesus in the world. Dare to take nothing for your journey.

Amen.