

“Travel Light”

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First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood

Sunday, July 8, 2018

2 Samuel 5:1-5

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, 'Look, we are your bone and flesh. For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The Lord said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel.' So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for forty years. At Hebron he reigned over Judah for seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah for thirty-three years.

Mark 6:1-13

He left that place and came to his home town, 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 offence at him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, 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.

So where is home for you? Where do you call home? People always ask me, "Well, where do you come from?" And I say, "I'm from Milwaukee," but then I have to add, "I'm from Milwaukee, by way of Madison, by way of Chicago." But I must always say, "But I'm not a Cubs fan" [laughter]. Sometimes we can't go home, sometimes we are forced to leave, and sometimes we are not welcome back. Going home means returning to the place where people know us before we even knew ourselves. Going home means returning to a place of old friends and family who knew us back in the day. There's a story about me and my home church in Chicago. See, around 40 years ago when I first started going there, I was trying to learn the names of all the people in the congregation. And each Sunday, the minister would get up and say, "Pray for the bereaved family. They're going through a hardship. So one day I was in a car with a bunch of other members, and I asked a question, "Who are the Bereaves? They're always in trouble" [laughter]. The driver had to pull off to the side of the road he was laughing so hard. I cannot live down the story of the Bereave family, and Jesus could not live down his reputation as one of Mary's boy. "Is not this the carpenter, son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" The Bible goes so far as to say that the people were offended by him. They were outraged. "How dare he come back here and tell us about God? Who does he think he is?" Jesus had to leave home. He was rejected.

Today, we are faced with a worldwide epidemic of homelessness. As of 2015, 1 in 100 people in the world have been forcibly displaced from their home. In other words, for every 100 people, 1 is a refugee. These refugees are usually forced out because of war and violence. The poet Warsan Shire wrote a powerful poem about home, and I encourage you to Google it when you get home. But for now, I'd like to read a small portion of it. She writes, "I want to go home. But home is the mouth of a shark, home is the barrel of the gun, and no one would leave home unless home chased you to the shore, unless home told you to quicken your legs, leave your clothes behind, crawl through the desert, wade through the oceans, drown, save, be hungry, beg, forget pride. Your survival is more important. No one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear saying, 'Leave. Run away from me now. I don't know what I've become, but I know that anywhere is safer than here.'"

Jesus could have left home for many reasons. He could have left home because the people did not respect him. He could have left home because a prophet would not be appreciated in this tiny town, but I believe Jesus left home for another reason. The people could not accept change. They could not accept the message of Jesus, a message that said, "God is doing a new thing, and you must repent. You must change." They couldn't accept the person that Jesus had grown up to become. They could not open their hearts to the possibility that God was using Jesus in a special way. The people could not accept Jesus because they could not accept change. They understood life in a straight linear line from childhood to adulthood. Jesus' father was a carpenter. Therefore, Jesus is a carpenter's son. Therefore, Jesus must be a carpenter. How could he be a prophet? How could he change? They rejected change because they did not have faith to believe that God can do different things, new things in unexpected ways. And Jesus could not do a miracle there. His home became inhospitable. He could not lay his head there. He was not welcome. He had to leave. And Jesus learned a lesson too. When people don't want you, you have to go. There comes a time when your welcome is worn out. There comes a time when it's time to go.

My mother used to say that when someone comes to visit, you take a fish and put it in their suitcase, and when the fish starts to stink, it's time for them to go. This is the lesson that Jesus teaches his disciples. Our scene shifts from Jesus' hometown to the area of the towns and villages beyond, and he sends out his disciples two by two without possessions, without food, with a staff, some sandals, and with one change of clothing. They cannot depend upon their own resources. They cannot care for themselves. They have to depend upon the hospitality of others in order to survive. Did I ever tell you that I think Jesus was the worst evangelist? I mean, he sent these poor disciples into the homes of these people with only one message, "Repent." Now my first career was in sales, and one of the first things you learn in sales is that you get the client to say yes. You start by the client saying yes, like, "Isn't it a beautiful day today?" Yes.

"Aren't these wonderful people here?"

Yes.

"Aren't these beautiful stained glasses?"

Yes.

And then you hit them with the product [laughter]. But not Jesus. He starts with, "Repent. Repent." And other places he starts with, "If you are not willing to leave your father, and mother, and sister, and brother, you are not worthy to follow me." And then Jesus ends with the punchline, "So pick up your cross and follow me." Jesus was the worst evangelist. No wonder he only had a church of, what, 12? And one of those was questionable [laughter]. So on this missionary journey, the disciples will go into the towns and villages and enter the homes where they were welcomed. They would stay, and learn, and live with the people. They would pray for the people and anoint them with oil, healing them, and when they wore out their welcome, when that fish started to stink, they would leave and go to another home or another town. But while living with the people in their houses and in these towns, the disciples were doing something unique. They were creating home, living with and learning with other people, were making a new space called home. Jesus taught them that home is not a noun but a verb. Home is not a place to go back to but a way in which we relate to one another and connect with one another. I guess this isn't bad evangelism. It's

radical evangelism. Going out as a stranger. Going out as an alien. Being open to listening, open to receiving. Going house to house. Being vulnerable. Receiving and giving. Blessing and being blessed. True ministry, my friends, is not about what we can do for others. True ministry is a gift exchange. We receive as we give. We give as we receive. The key to what Jesus is saying is the disciples have to leave their baggage behind. They have to take all of their assumptions of what the church is supposed to be, and their expectations about how people are supposed to act, their anticipations about what's going to happen because they are God's representatives, and leave all that stuff behind if they're going to make home with others.

As Presbyterians, I believe our heaviest baggage is our privilege. Privilege tells us that we have the answers because of our place in society, our wealth, or our religious heritage. We are Presbyterians. We signed the Declaration of Independence. Our form of government influenced the way Washington runs. We might not want to say that one too loud [laughter]. But y'all know kind of what I'm getting with there. We know how to build magnificent churches, and we know what people need. I thank God for my Presbyterian education. I have an earned Master's of Divinity, an earned Doctorate of Ministries. I wrote over 120 papers for these degrees and defended my dissertation, but in a world where the next generation claims to be spiritual but not religious, where denomination affiliation is a choice, not an obligation or a birthright, my Presbyterian privilege may not serve me well. It may actually be baggage. Our baggage blinds us to action. Our baggage tells us what people need before we even ask them. Our baggage gives us the answers before we even ask the questions. If we're going to be disciples of Jesus in the 21st century, it is just as important what we leave as what we take. If we want to make home with others, we have to leave our baggage behind.

I find it interesting that Jesus does not send out the disciples with oil, and yet they are anointing people. I believe the oil is what the disciples received from the people that they made home with. Ministry is a gift exchange, and in the ministry exchange, that's when we make home. Oil is a powerful symbol of welcome and hospitality. Oil is used to protect people from the heat of the day. It is also used for healing, and blessing, and transferring the spirit of belonging. And so, my friends, this is my prayer to you and to this presbytery. May we put our baggage aside and make home. May we become transparent and vulnerable people, willing to listen and to hear, willing to accept the oil from others. May we be a people who bless and welcome even the homeless and the refugee. May we shield people from overwhelming circumstances and help to bring healing into their lives, and may we have the courage to welcome and embrace the change that God is doing in our world, in our presbytery, in this church, and in each of you. So then that home is no longer a place we must return to but we make home right here with one another. Amen.