

070316 - 7th Sunday of Pentecost

“The Things We Carry With Us” - Rev Seth D Jones ©

Scripture: Galatians 6:7-18; Luke 10:1-20

By the benefits of my position, I am able to share something resembling the faith in the community. Enough people know me as the pastor of Rockland Congregational Church that, if I talk about faith, it is no surprise. Without the title of position, however, I am terrible at sharing my faith with someone else. If you are like me, you carry a lot of baggage when trying to build relationships. Once we have enough armor, enough justifications, enough protection, only then can we go out and face the world. One of my professors at Luther Seminary, Karoline Lewis, put it this way:

“our tendency is to put all kinds of stipulations in place before we feel secure to go out and witness to what we know about God”.

Part of the issue is that we think we have to go out and *give something* to other people. We are obligated to *share the Good News and baptize in the name of Jesus*, as Matthew 26 tells us.

Paul, at the beginning of chapter 6 in Galatians, knows this and he simplifies the problem by telling the new Christians in Galatia,

“Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:1b-2).

The baggage we carry with us as Christians, finally, are the burdens of one another.

Jesus’ example to us suggests all the preparations we generate in ourselves - the machinations of mind and spirit, the girding up of our loins, the making sure all our arguments are in place - are only busy work with no value whatsoever. Our personal baggage, the things we carry with us, actually work against us when we are building relationships.

Contrary to our Americanized attempts to ‘evangelize’ others, Jesus suggests something quite surprising in his commission to the seventy disciples today. He strongly suggests that all the power and ability to share the faith comes from *receiving from others, not giving something to them.*

Jesus tells the disciples to receive the hospitality of those they have been sent to.

“Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid...Whenever you enter a town, eat what is set before you...” (Lk 10:7-8).

Another way to put this is to rely on the hospitality that has been shown the disciples.

Jesus, in other words, is telling the disciples,

*“Your work is to go out and **receive hospitality** from those who would give it to you.”*

Those who do not, shake the dust off and move along. Don't argue. Because what makes a follower and disciple of Christ is the ability to receive.

How hard is it for us to receive? When I was at Mission Mazahua, Norberto, who runs the mission, took us up into the mountains to a graduation party. Tents were set up, musicians played folk music on a stage, many a person milled about sharing with one another. In the corner, was an outdoor kitchen with all kinds of wonderful smells coming from the cooking foods.

A party in Mexico, is a huge affair, and it is considered a great gift to the community. Everyone gets fed, and left-over food is at once a sign of wealth and also something of an insult to the host. Before we went up the rocky dirt road up the mountain to the party, packed as we were into a hot SUV with poor suspension, Norberto stopped the SUV, turned around in his seat and said to all of us,

“It is a great insult to not eat the food given to you in the native communities in the mountain. Hospitality is very important to all of us, and to deny the ability to be a good host is a direct insult to the entire family. So eat what they give you.”

Norberto must have known something about the food we were to be given, because when we sat down at a long table under the tent, the host served us joyfully. He put a bowl of soup in front of us. We all ate without asking what we were eating. It was only after we had eaten about half the soup that we found out we were feasting on tripe soup. Tripe is the intestine of pig. I don't like eating foods that are based on a dare.

When we are shown hospitality by others, we feel obligated, indebted, perhaps even humbled. All the things we carry into the relationship are rendered unimportant when we simply receive from others. This is why Jesus sends the disciples out with “*no purse, no bag, no sandals*”. He tells them, “*greet no one on the road*” because the compressed, immediate and profound need for the disciples to learn to receive the hospitality of others is so important, it cannot be put off by unproductive conversations along the road. We must simply go out and receive the hospitality others are waiting to give us.

Our mythology of rugged American individualism in our makes accepting hospitality even more difficult. It is an attractive myth and people use it to great effect to prove how they have pulled themselves up by their bootstraps, how they are self-made, how they have made the right decisions without the input of others around them. It is part of what we carry with us into our relationships. But it is an unhistorical lie, finally.

If we, as Congregationalists, go back to the Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth, 396 years ago, we do not see a rugged individualist story. Rather, for at least 9 years, we see a story of mutual community, mutual support, and mutual reliance upon one another to support one another throughout the short history of Plymouth Colony. This is a story of how one lives in a community that seeks the very best of those with whom they share their lives. This is where we get the powerful American idea of the ‘the common good’, the Christian expression of ‘mutual equality in the eyes of God’, the understanding of what it means to live in community under a covenant with God.

On this 4th of July weekend, it is worth considering the deep structures of community built on deep faith that are in the deep past of our history. If we take that foundation seriously, we will see very clearly, there is no such thing as a self-made person, no such thing as pulling oneself up by one’s bootstraps, no decisions without all kinds of input from many directions.

This is why the Kingdom of God is so surprising. Not only does Jesus call the disciples to rely wholly on him and on God, he calls them to rely wholly on the hospitality of others, and even more so, one another. Remember, as the seventy go out into the world they are sent out two-by-two. They are never alone. Further, every place they go, each disciple knows there are 69 other disciples doing what they are doing. Most Sundays, we have close to seventy people here for worship. Every time you leave this building, do you leave knowing there are 69 or so others who are seeking to build a community of peace, faith, love, and hospitality? Because that is what we are called to do, to carry with us the knowledge of those with whom we share the promises of Christ.

Jesus doesn't give the disciples anything to guard against the hospitality of others. Nor does he give us any way to make a claim to all the things we might want to carry with us. No baggage, except the desire to carry the burdens of others. No purse, no bag, no sandals. Just before this, Jesus says, *"I am sending you out like lambs among the wolves."* We go out to receive from others with nothing to guard against our fears and imaginings of what might happen.

Indeed, *"what do we hoard to avoid dependence on others"* (Karoline Lewis). We are sent out with the awareness of what we *do not have*, not a reliance on what *we think we need or have*.

We go out and receive. Our responsibility as followers of Jesus is not to give anything at first. Anything we give is in response, out of gratitude, for the hospitality shown us. And even then, we are only responsible for receiving the hospitality given, curing the sick in gratitude, and to proclaim 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'. Nothing is forced upon others, nothing is expected from those who would host a follower of the Lord. Reception and rejection is left up to those we encounter, not us.

In our story today,

"the seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!'"

It is an exciting homecoming and it has all been made possible because the disciples received the hospitality shown them in the name of Jesus Christ.

In gratitude, they healed people, they proclaimed the presence of the Kingdom of God that has drawn near, and seen the power of God in their midst. It is likely the echoes of Psalm 126 resounded within the disciples:

When the LORD ^srestored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who ^tdream.

Then our ^umouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy;

then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad.

Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negeb!

Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!

He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of Joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

Perhaps also, as the seventy shared their stories of hospitality given and received, they heard Psalm 133 resonating as well:

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!¹

It is like the precious ^joil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on ^hthe collar of his robes!

It is like ⁱthe dew of ^jHermon, which falls on ^kthe mountains of Zion!

For there the LORD ^lhas commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

This is not about what we have done, but what God is doing right now. That is why Jesus tells the disciples,

"Do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Lk 10:20).

This is not an individual project. There is no self-made disciple in the 2000 year cloud of witnesses of followers of Jesus Christ. There is no mythology of self-reliance or rugged individualism that happens in this story, or in our history with this story. And also, there is no group project where we lose our self-identity.

In our mutual community of faith, there is a good reason we do not lose our individual self - because this is a great, active, living story in which God has invited us to participate.

Let each of us receive the hospitality of God and Christ. Let us share in the story such that those we meet receive us as a healing presence, as a proclamation that the Kingdom of God has drawn near to you. And this is happening right now, today - through the power of the Holy Spirit given to us by Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God has drawn near to **you, to each of us, together, in this gathered community of followers of Jesus.**

These are the things we carry with us - the ability to receive, the knowledge of the presence of the Kingdom of God, the healing available in the Holy Spirit - all carried for others in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.