

Road Trip!
Luke 10:1-7
July 25, 2010—Covenant Presbyterian
The Rev. Catherine Robinson

The FAA and the airline companies
are forcing us all
to learn more
about travelling light.
Pretty soon,
I'm afraid we won't be taking
anything in the air
that can't go in
a quart size zip-lock bag.

I can't stand that!
I'm not good
at travelling light.

I know that I'm not alone.
We may try to pare down what we carry along,
but we end up taking
too much...
more than we need.

Sometimes it's hard
to travel light.
And it's even harder
to travel light
as we do the work
to which Christ calls us.

But that is exactly what Jesus tells the 70 to do
as he sends them out
on their missionary journey.
He tells them to travel light
in a major way.
"Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals," he says.
You don't even need a quart size zip-lock bag!
Forget the new shorts you bought.
Lose the credit card.

"Eat and drink whatever is provided."
Sounds like your mother, doesn't he?
None of this quibbling about personal tastes.
Leave the cooler and snack bag at home.
Just eat whatever is set before you.

In fact, all you need to carry with you
is a message:
the kingdom of God has come near.
That's it:

the kingdom of God has come near.
 That's what you take with you.
 Well, that's pretty extreme, isn't it?
 Carry nothing.
Nothing but a message.
 God will provide everything else that you need
 through the people whom you meet.
 It *is* somewhat comforting to realize that
 road trips in 1st century Palestine
 were a quite a bit different
 from road trips in 21st century America.
 Instead of the Hampton Inn and McDonald's,
 they had what is called the Hospitality Code.
 It was a part of Jewish Law.
 Providing hospitality to strangers—
 giving them food
 and a place to sleep—
 all of that was a part of what God had
 commanded people to do for one another.
 So they didn't need to carry
 what we need to carry.
 But even if they didn't need
 a car full of suitcases,
 people still usually took along
 at least a few coins and an extra tunic.
 They prepared for a journey.
 What if you were in Gentile territory?
 You couldn't eat in someone's home!
 You needed money to buy some food that was clean!
 You needed to be prepared!
 But here Jesus says, "Forget it."
 God will provide what you need
 through the people you meet.
 Period.
 End of discussion.
 Carry nothing.
 Oh, what hard word that is
 for most of us to hear!
 Carry nothing.
 God will provide.
 Can you imagine that?
 I can't.
 I think it's extremely hard
 for most of us to imagine,
 because in spite of all
 that we have in this life—
 more than enough food

and shelter
 and clothing—
 in spite of all of that,
 most of us live with
 an amazing degree of fear
 that there will never be enough.
 We're afraid of running out,
 of not being prepared.
 And so we keep getting more—
 more clothes,
 more money in the bank,
 more fat on our bodies,
 more miles in our carbon footprint.
 We just keep adding to the pile.
 Some of us worry that we'll run out of clever things to say,
 so we pile up more words,
 more nifty ideas,
 more concepts to consider.
 What if we run out?!
 What if there's not enough?!
 Oh no!
 Work harder!
 More accomplishments.
 More feathers in our cap.
 Pile it up!
 Be prepared!
 Don't forget anything!
 And we carry all of that baggage around
 as we journey through our life
 and our ministry in the name of Christ.
 And maybe we *are* prepared a lot of the time.
 Maybe we are.
 But here is the problem that comes along:
 We get
 so weighed down
 with all of our efforts
 to be prepared,
 to get it right,
 to have what we need,
 that we miss out
 on the places where God is providing
 more than we can provide for ourselves.
 We get so busy making our own plans,
 that we don't attend to God's plan.
 Carry nothing, says Jesus.
 Carry nothing but a message.
 And what Jesus would have us learn

is to trust God
 rather than trusting ourselves.
 God will provide what we need
 through the people whom we meet.
 So, get rid of that baggage, says Jesus,
 so that you can receive the gifts of God.
 Very often,
 Christians who serve
 in very impoverished areas of the world
 learn this lesson most profoundly.
 Over and over,
 I hear and read stories that Americans tell,
 of receiving an incredible wealth of grace
 from some of the world's poorest people.
 Recently, I read some reflections offered by one person,
 a Lutheran minister named Paul Palumbo,
 who has traveled many times in Nicaragua.
 Palumbo describes one experience
 of what he calls a "reverse mission trip"—
 a trip where a group North American teens traveled to Nicaragua,
 not to repair anything or bring any other services,
 but simply to learn how
 "Jesus is alive and well,
 hanging out among the people
 of this impoverished, beautiful land."
 Listen to Palumbo's account of the group's efforts
 to take Jesus' words seriously
 and to eat whatever was set before them:
 "Every time we sat to eat rice and beans,
 we received not only the standard fare
 of most of Latin America
 but, more profoundly,
 also a steady diet of honor and humility.
 To be served rice and beans
 prepared over a stone oven
 fueled by wood in dirt-floor houses
 on the only little table in the house
 was an honor.
 To be told the stories
 of our host families' lives
 over the meal
 was an honor.
 To have the tiny house
 in which we were guests
 rearranged
 so that we might have a bedroom to ourselves
 was an honor.

The tendency, of course,
 was to raise one objection or another,
 that what was set before us
 was not to our taste
 or, more typically among our group,
 that it was too much
 for a poor family to spend on rich North Americans.

These objections were both true, perhaps,
 but for the sake of the gift
 and for the sake of learning to receive,
 it was important to eat what was set before us.

And when my host mother
 offered me coffee one morning
 and an egg with my rice and beans,
 it was truly humbling."

(Paul K. Palumbo, "Eating What Is Set before You,"
http://www.luthersem.edu/word&world/Archives/213_The_Law/213_Palumbo.pdf)

That's a wonderful account,
 and many of us have similar stories to tell
 of times when we have received grace upon grace
 from those who didn't have
 enough possessions
 to fill one suitcase.

We don't even have to travel
 to a third world country
 to have that experience.

It may happen at Dismas House,
 or while volunteering
 at the Rio Grande Food Project.
 You may experience it at the bedside
 of someone who is feeling beaten down
 and impoverished by what
 life has sent his way.

You would like to go
 with a whole suitcase full of
 neat and pat answers,
 or conversation topics,
 or wisdom,
 but you discover that
 you really have to go empty.

All that you have to offer
 is a message.
 And from the one whom you meet,
 you nevertheless receive
 grace upon grace.

It's a difficult call that Jesus gives.

Carry nothing.
 Carry nothing but a message.
 God will provide the rest
 in the people whom we meet.
 To respond to that call
 takes a powerful amount of trust.
 Not many of us are ready
 to take the radical kind of risk
 that Jesus suggests.
 If we think we have something that will be helpful
 on whatever journeys we take in life and ministry,
 we're probably going to want to bring it along.
 But maybe,
 this text can call us
 to keep on practicing letting go
 of some of our baggage,
 to keep on trying to travel a little lighter,
 and to be open to receiving what we need
 from the people we meet.
 Funny thing....
 Sometimes life doesn't give us a choice.
 Sometimes life has a way
 of taking our precious cargo away from us,
 through illness,
 or financial loss,
 or death...
 or whatever.
 Jesus' promise in this text is that,
 whether the loss of baggage
 is voluntary or involuntary,
 God's grace is always sufficient.
 God will provide
 through the people we meet.
 Keep on practicing letting go.
 Keep on traveling a little lighter.
 That is how we learn to trust,
 and to notice
 the wealth God gives,
 especially when we have nothing.
 Thanks be to God.
 Amen.