

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
July 2, 2017

Text: Matthew 10:34-42

Theme: "Pack Your Bags"

It's summer, time for trips, vacations. We already had ours and we much enjoyed it. It was a time of refreshing and renewing. Vacations, trips, can take some planning. Proper reservations need to be made, tickets in order. If you are traveling abroad then documents like passports, visas, and required immunizations are in order. Yes, and enough money to get you there and back is helpful.

You will need to pack your bags. In those bags will go clothes, documents, medicines, and items for person needs. All these things are to supply you along the way. If it is not all well planned or if plans get disrupted then what was supposed to be relaxing and refreshing can turn out to be very perplexing and stressful instead.

In our lesson from Matthew 10, Jesus is about to send the Twelve out on a trip. Chapter 10 is all His instructions for that trip. As He unfolds before them as to what will happen they may have been a little less than eager to pack their bags. They could be asking, "Is it going to be worth it?"

Jesus puts before the Twelve their itinerary. They are to go only to the lost sheep of Israel (10:6). They are to say, "The Kingdom of God is at hand," and they are to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons. (vss 7, 8) Jesus also has traveling instructions for us. That trip is to be walking behind Him heeding His voice. AS we do so we will be light of the world and the salt of the earth. In that capacity we will carry one another's burdens. We will do good to all especially those of the household of

faith. We will love not only in word but in deed and in truth. This means using our time and our resources as we walk in the this servant way of life to act on that love.

The sheep had been charged with gathering more sheep. They call shepherds to lead them in that work. Now the charge goes beyond the lost sheep of Israel, it is to all nations, make disciples of all nations. Those disciples are made as the Spirit works through baptizing and teaching. The shepherds lead, but every sheep is involved as we declare the praises of the One who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. As others notice and ask we do give an answer, no, we don't deny, we give the reason for the hope that hope we have in us, the Living Hope of Christ.

Pack your bags for the journey behind our Lord. But we may not be so eager. As we read Jesus words we may see this as the Lots to Lose Tour. It may not be as secure as we would like it. It is not so easy to loosen our grip on our time and our resources in responses to the opportunities put before us. There is no guarantee of success as we would like it. Jesus tells the Twelve, "If anyone will receive you," (vs 14) for a disciple, a prophet, a righteous man, a child of the faith if not always received. Jesus says, "You will be hated for my name's sake." (vs 22) He tells them when they are persecuted in one town to flee to the next and that the disciple is not above the teacher." (vss 22, 23) He speaks of sheep among wolves (vs 16). That doesn't sound like a very secure location.

Jesus speaks of challenges to close relationships. He says He did not come to bring peace, but a sword, division (vs 34). He said it will son against father, daughter against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. There will be division when all are not of the same mind concerning Jesus. There will be hard situations. Jesus says if we love those dear ones more than Him we are not worthy of Him. Divisions in family can be part of the cross carrying. This is not one's first choices when it comes to loads.

Yes, the Lot to lose Tour, it could even mean one's life is lost. But Jesus tells us if you find your life, that is, you abort the trip, then you lose. If you lose your life, stay on the trip till the end, then you win—life!

So are you ready to pack your bags? For most of us they were packed a long time ago. How is the trip going? Jesus has some instructions about packing earlier in chapter 10. He says to pack light. No gold, or silver, nor copper in the belts, no bag for the journey, not even an extra change of clothes, nor sandals nor staff. He says the needs will be met along the way (vs 10). When we think of what we can supply, really it's only lightweight stuff. Yes, we can have gold, silver, copper, stocks, bonds, laptops, pads, and smartphones. These certainly can be resources for the trip, but we can get so caught up in having enough for the trip we never go on the trip. And what if we had it all? Jesus says, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?" (Matthew 16:26)

So we only have lightweight stuff and yet we have some very heavy baggage. Paul knew the load. There was a time when he thought he could carry much of the load himself. He was a Pharisee, zealous for the tradition of the fathers. In that zeal he blasphemed and persecuted, but one day he found himself knocked off his high horse and flat on his face and he was never the same. Now he had a new righteousness, a sure one, that was give to Him in Jesus, Jesus whom he formerly persecuted. Now after years of faithful service we see that man confessing his wretchedness in Romans 7. He could never carry the load of God's demands of the law, found that just when he wanted to, he was doing just the opposite. There was no way to unload the burden of his sin through the law, not for Paul and not for us. The law is good, but we are not. The law even shows us

our best is no good before God. How will we be delivered from this damning baggage?
Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:25a)

Our baggage has been checked. When we check our baggage at the airport we hope is we will see it again. Usually that is the case. The baggage that Jesus checks for us we never want to see it again. And the promise is we won't. Our iniquities have been taken from us and drowned in the depths of the sea. As far as the east is from the west so far he has taken our transgressions from us. Jesus took all the baggage of our sin upon Himself at the cross. When it comes to sin we have everything to lose. We have need to lose it all for if one little sin remains it is enough to separate us from God. But Jesus took it all, no sin that has not been atoned for by His sacrifice. He has made, completed, the journey of perfect righteousness and complete atonement for us.

Now our risen and ascended Lord Jesus is at the right hand of the Father. There He is preparing the places for the full number of Israel, Jew and Gentile, to be brought in. In Him we do have life. The life of new creation is not owed to us, no, not owed, but bestowed in Jesus. Jesus speaks of the rewards, but the reward is dependent upon the faithfulness and the generosity of the Rewarder. A prophet's reward, and a righteous person's award is the same. That reward is inheritance of the saints with Jesus. Jesus says one who gives a drink of cold water to one of these little ones he will not lose his reward. Jesus will speak of that reward to the sheep when He comes as Judge of the living and the dead, "Come, you blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...I was thirsty and you gave me drink." (Matthew 25:34, 37)
Yes, so worth it, look what awaits at the end.

Worth it as we are on a fruitful journey right now. In Matthew 11:1, we read, "When Jesus had finished instructing His twelve disciples, He went on from there to preach and

teach in their cities.” The Twelve would go on their journey that day and they would go on their journey given them before Jesus ascension, that of being His witnesses in Jerusalem, and all Judea, and Samaria until the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8) Well, one would be the first, but not that second and longer journey, but his replacement would. They would experience the very troubles, hardships, and persecutions that Jesus spoke of. They remembered Jesus’ words, all of them, including, “You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” (vs 22) They did and were. Because of their faithfulness the message has come to us.

Now we are on that journey brothers and sisters. As we follow the Good Shepherd there is full life even now. We feed on His Word and drink of His waters of forgiveness. We do feed ourselves, but it is not self-serving. We continue to feed so we may follow His lead. We know our true treasure is with our Lord. We use our earthly treasures as tools in His service. Yes, there may be hardship, not always a smooth flight, but such times are the occasion to hold on all the tighter to His promises and point others to the same Lord.

Our bags are packed. Our Lord gives us all we need to support this body and life. He gives us the treasure of forgiveness for a lifetime. We have our eyes on the reward at the end even as we journey faithfully so more may be on the journey. For Jesus’ sake.

Amen