

Proper 6A
St Matthew 9:35-10:23
June 18, 2017
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Two Rules

There are two instructions that Jesus gave to his disciples that struck me as I read over the text for today: one is to travel light. The other is to have good boundaries so that you will not waste your time or feel abused by toxic people.

So, as we begin the summer season, many of us are already contemplating travel for vacations. The admonition to travel light makes sense. On my last trip, I tried to follow that rule. In the past, I have always brought more clothing than I needed. I also take more books than I can read. Even so, following this caveat, I still brought more shirts than I could wear. I did bring an extra book, but I did get to it. I finished two other books on vacation; one was a novel, the other a spiritual reading book that was also a page-turner, if you can believe that, on minimalism, entitled, "Goodbye Things." On each trip I take notes about what works and doesn't work, and I try to learn in order to make travel on future trips easier. It is nice not to have my truck overloaded with unnecessary things packed in it, so much so, that the needful things are left behind. I have done that from experience. And air travel now is much more weight sensitive, limiting folks in many cases to one carry-on bag and two suitcases. If you can't fit your stuff into that space, you are out of luck, or you will have to pay a lot of extra money to bring a third bag. And in some of the really large airports it is a pain in the neck to drag around a lot of heavy luggage. The problem with taking too many things is that your baggage gets heavier and it just tires you out carrying all that stuff around. I carry around enough baggage every day, believe me, so I don't need to increase my physical load if I don't have to. Those words of Jesus sound pretty savvy along about now.

One of the ways I used to procrastinate before I began a project was that I would visit the stationary store and the bookstore before I began writing or working. I would always be sure I had all the things I needed for the project. Little was I aware of my own motivation to procrastinate, kidding myself that I was hard at work organizing what I needed to do. Of course, I wasted plenty of money doing this, buying office supplies I did not need as well as picking up books that I never really got around to reading in some cases. Travel light and focus on the task at hand.

What I have learned is that you don't need a lot of stuff to carry out your work or to simply relax. In fact, stuff often gets in the way of the task at hand, and too much stuff can make a vacation or retreat stressful. I have never been in a hotel room that didn't have toiletries or provide a hair dryer, yet I have always packed them. And what city or place in the continental U.S. doesn't have a store handy where you can pick any of these items up if you forget them or need them? To add insult to injury, we always grab all those hotel toiletry items, thinking they are free (when

they are included in the cost of the room we paid for) and then end up cluttering our closets and cabinets at home with tons of these left over vacation items we intend to, but never use again.

The admonition to travel lightly applies even more so to the spiritual life. You don't need ten Bibles and three commentaries and several handbooks to read the Bible. In fact, the more materials you have, the more scattered and distracted you get. It can get overwhelming! All you need is one Bible, well worn, your favorite, with your notes in it, and of course, one that reads easily for you so that wording does not become an added barrier to digesting this spiritual food. The same may be said of religious paraphernalia. The more crosses you wear dilute the meaning and it becomes all about the jewelry. The more pictures and crucifixes you have hanging on your walls, the less focused you get and they become part of the background instead of having one item which stands out in the foreground, that grabs your attention when you see it. It's all about focus. Travel light in the spiritual life, as you can get caught up in all the stuff and miss the opportunity to meet the one whom the stuff represents, or worse yet, get caught up on worrying about your stuff such that you miss the opportunity to minister and serve God.

This is Jesus' point in the Gospel this morning: Travel light!

“Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts— no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep.” You see, God knows us. God understands us. God has now walked in our shoes. You don't have to get ready. You are ready to serve each morning. And we need not worry about people we care for rewarding us or giving us extra stuff that only gets in the way of what we are doing. Your reward is in heaven.

The other thing that struck me was the observation about keeping good boundaries. “Boundaries” is a popular term these days which suggests that we set limits on the use of our time and also upon toxic people who intrude upon our space, our work, our peace and our lives.

God set boundaries in the use of God's time. God set aside a time of rest, on the seventh day, a Sabbath. It was a day to lay down the tools of your trade, the worries on your mind, and refresh yourself with rest and peace. There is to be no work on the Sabbath. There is to be no shopping. When I was young, we had the blue laws to help us with this. Now with the Blue Laws long gone, we are left with seven days a week, with one day pretty much the same as the rest. Oh, we do reduce the number of hours you can buy alcohol on Sunday and Holidays, the tonic people use during their rest, and so this Puritan law makes little sense to me. If we have any free time in our weeks we are tempted to fill it, thereby avoiding the problem of facing our lives if we have nothing to do. Sabbath gave us the gift of nothing, and there is nothing like nothing to bring peace and serenity.

Jesus also set boundaries with His time, taking time to refresh himself by going apart to pray and rest. The Gospels note these times, and we should too. They are an important example about setting time boundaries, even when the work you are doing is the most important in human history and the precious time you have to do it is limited to only three years.

The Gospel also records the words of Jesus this morning talking about setting boundaries with the naysayers and toxic people of His day: “If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet.”

Having good boundaries is good stewardship of your time and your own wellness. Time is a

precious commodity. God knows that, even though God's time is without limit, God knows that our time has limits. When you allow toxic people to cross the boundaries of your own time, you allow them to waste your time. Even worse, such naysayers often go way beyond stressing us out, to the point where we are literally consumed physically, emotionally and spiritually by them. If someone does not wish to listen to you, if they fill the air with the sound of their own voice, there is little likelihood they will ever be able to hear what you have to say, no matter how important it is. It is like the toxic person, who on being warned that the building is on fire, yells, screams and drops the f-bomb on the messenger for disturbing his peace. Later on he is overcome by the smoke and flames and dies. We have seen those who refuse to listen to reasonable warnings, and who later must suffer the consequences of their hubris and poor choices. They're own toxicity ultimately destroys them. Jesus knew there would be people like this and so God warned his disciples.

The poet Robert Frost in his poem, "The Mending Wall," said it well so long ago: "Good fences make good neighbors." Setting boundaries shows respect for both yourself, your neighbors and for God.

So here we are, beginning that long stretch of "ordinary time" on the church Calendar after all the excitement of the springtime holy-days which we just completed last Sunday with "Trinity" Sunday. God now sends us out to do the work God has given us to do. Remember to travel lightly. Remember to set your boundaries in your own mind and life, and be sure to keep and honor them. This will yield a fruitful harvest come the fall. It's just a few months from now. Use them wisely!

AMEN