

# *Life as Pilgrimage*

Luke 10:1-24

Rev. Jim Zazzera ~ 22 July 2018 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

10 After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. 2 He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. 3 Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. 4 Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. 5 Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' 6 And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. 7 Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. 8 Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; 9 cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' 10 But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 11 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.' 12 I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

13 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. 14 But at the judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. 15 And you, Capernaum,

will you be exalted to heaven?

No, you will be brought down to Hades.

16 "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and

17 The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" 18 He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. 19 See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. 20 Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

21 At that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 22 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

23 Then turning to the disciples, Jesus said to them privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! 24 For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it."

(Luke 10:1-24, NRSV)

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I don't know if you have considered it, but the history of our faith is all about traveling. Abram and Sarai were called by God to settle in Canaan. The Hebrew people were set free from slavery in Egypt and traveled for years to come to a new land. Jews were ripped from their homes in Israel & Judah and taken far away into captivity in Babylon. Jesus spent his life wandering the Galilean countryside until he made his last fatal pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Paul the Apostle wandered all over the ancient Roman empire proclaiming the good news that had been revealed to him. Some of this travel was chosen, some was escape, some was more of a forced march, some had an end point, some was just purposeful meandering.

Today's story gives us an overview of another trip, a brief journey that Jesus assigned to his followers. In Luke 10, we see that Jesus' tasked 70 of his disciples to announce the kingdom of God to the world. This was no Vantage River cruise or spring semester abroad. Though brief, the story Luke tells is both complicated and profound.

This is a challenging passage. One writer comments: "Luke 10 contains a concentration of sayings

that are embarrassing and difficult for the church.”<sup>1</sup> There is also a lot in this passage. There is way too much in these 24 verses to unpack in 20 minutes. This is no simple story. Yet here it is, and I invite us all to see what God has for us.

As I thought through this passage, it touched me in a personal way as I considered my own life and the future experiences I anticipate. So as we consider the journey of the 70, as I reflect on the particular road I look forward to traveling, I hope you will see how God is revealed to you along your own path.

Let’s think together about the challenges that these 70 people face as they travel. What does the Gospel writer want us to understand about what obstacles and experiences these disciples faced along their road?

The first thing comes in the fourth verse of the chapter.

**Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road.<sup>2</sup>**

As he has done elsewhere, Jesus is telling his disciples that when they are out on the road serving him, they are to travel light. To emphasize his point he tells his followers to “greet no one along the way”—to be single minded in their task.<sup>3</sup> For some funny reason, being burdened with too much extraneous equipment is a hindrance to the work Jesus gave them.

Was it because they wouldn’t be able to move fast enough? Was it because they would be too invested in the possessions they brought with them? Was it because it would make them vulnerable to the robbers along the highway? Was it because Jesus wanted them to be dependent on brothers and sisters in each town or even on strangers along the way? Whatever the reason, Jesus wants his disciples to be unencumbered.

Beginning on 21st of September, Lena and I will join thousands of others in walking the Camino de Santiago, an ancient pilgrimage path taken by hundreds of thousands of Pilgrims throughout many centuries. We will take a particular route called the Camino Frances and start in St. Jean Pied de Port in Southern France. With God’s strength we will take about 5 weeks and walk the 500 miles from St. Jean to Santiago, Spain.

Now one the most important tasks any pilgrim on the Camino takes on is deciding what to take and what not to take on his or her journey. Conventional wisdom says that one should carry no more than 10% of one’s

own body weight (this includes water, food, clothing, technology, first aid, etc.) Here’s a picture of one pilgrim’s bag & possessions. Not much, right? I am shooting for less than 18 pounds.

So why do it? Why give up all that convenience and clothing? Why leave behind so much?

The answer is simple - if you want to travel far and effectively, you can’t be weighed down too much. There is a huge difference between 15 and twenty pounds on your back. It could make the difference between ending a day in joy or in unnecessary pain. It could mean you don’t make it to your anticipated daily destination. It could mean that every step is filled with frustration. Why carry what you really don’t need?

What I wonder about is whether this same advice applies to our lives in general. What am I carrying that which weighs me down? What weight prevents me from not only fulfilling the purpose God has given me, but from simply living a healthy life?

For me, possessions that promise convenience often get in the way of relationships. They are my excess baggage. Mistakes that I keep revisiting keep me stuck in my life. So too, they are excess baggage. Expectations that control my direction leave me mired in disappointment. They are my excess baggage.

So a simple question. What is your excess baggage? What is slowing you down, impairing your travel though life, immobilizing you? Perhaps Jesus would be glad to lift some of that from you. I think that is some of the good news present in this passage.

There is another line in today’s story that really reaches out and grabs me. Listen to it again in verse 7:

**Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house.<sup>4</sup>**

There is a lot about hospitality that is embedded in this passage. In short, Jesus seems to encourage his followers here to depend on the hospitality of strangers. Perhaps they are staying with other Christ followers in each town they visit, or perhaps they are just counting on that good ol’ Middle eastern hospitality (legendary to this day), but the point is - Jesus’ disciples are not only encouraged to travel light but to really depend on others.

<sup>1</sup> *Interpreters Bible - Luke*, p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 10:4, *NRSV*.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 10:4 *NRSV*.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 10:7, *NRSV*.

How counter is that to our American value of independence and self-provision? We'd rather drive an RV than show up at a friend's house. We'd rather stay at Courtyard by Marriott than a cousin's place at the lake.

If you didn't get the point about hospitality the first time verse 8 reminds us,

**Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you.**<sup>5</sup>

Don't miss the particularly radical nature of this. If you were a Jewish Christian in this day you might be staying with Gentiles, people who in a previous life you would have considered unclean. These are people whose food is NOT kosher, people with whom you would NEVER eat. Yet here they are told, "eat what is set before you."

IN a sermon a few weeks ago we were told that Jesus reminded us that we are to welcome the least, to offer hospitality to others. Here Jesus tells us to receive the welcome of anyone, to receive hospitality from others. It is as if he is saying that a fundamental Christian stance is one of dependence.

When people have asked me about walking the Camino, I have said to many that I look forward to the simplicity of knowing that every day my only job is to walk 15 miles, to find something to eat, and to find a place to sleep. But I fear that may be easier said than done.

I have always preferred having reservations and knowing where I am going than to being surprised. I have always liked having lots of options when I am choosing what to eat. I have always carefully thought through the kind of places I will stay the night. I have always wanted some control over whom I travel with. But none of this is the reality of the Camino. When I really think about it, I am not sure that is what I would want it to be that way anyway.

You see, though I have some trepidation, I look forward to seeing what is served at the "pilgrim meal" in each town where we will stay the night. I wonder about whether Lena and I will get bottom bunks in the *albergue* (pilgrim hostel) we stay at in each town. I am open to being surprised by whom I might meet and stories we will share as we walk along the way.

To be in control is to not receive hospitality. To manage each detail is to not be open to dependence and

delight. As one of my colleagues says, in life "you get what you get," and maybe that is not a bad thing. On the Camino, "you get what you get." To be willing to receive what you get seems to me a prerequisite for a full appreciation of the Camino.

I am not sure I have taken this stance very well in life. I want to show hospitality. I want to invite people into my home and life when I am at my best. I always want to pay back people for kindnesses offered to me. I never want to be caught anytime anywhere when I am in need. But that is precisely what Jesus seems to recommend for his followers. I suspect he is recommending that to us even in our day.

I cannot tell you how many times I have heard someone in this church (young and old) say to me, "I don't want to be dependent!" But what if that is precisely what God wants of us? To reach out in need to grandparents for a helping hand when the childcare becomes too much. To ask a friend to tutor me when the math seems impossibly difficult. To find a Narcotics Anonymous group when chemicals have overtaken my life. To search for a listening ear when I am overwhelmed with loneliness.

Maybe it is not our giving that transforms us, but receiving genuine hospitality. Maybe it is not our strength that will make us the people God intends us to be, but our dependence.

One clear impression I get of this journey taken by the 70 is that they will experience resistance. The passage is full of it. It is one of the things that make this reading so difficult. Verse 3 says:

**I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.**

Verse 10 and 11 recommends:

**But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you.'**

Verse 16 reminds the disciples:

**Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.**

I've got to be honest, if I am one of these followers of Jesus, these mission trips do not look that great! Jesus expected to experience resistance (and even violence)

<sup>5</sup> Luke 10:8, *NRSV*.

for his own work. He tells his followers to expect the same.

There will be many things that stand in your way. There will be people who won't understand. There will be individuals who actively reject you.

But when traveling with Jesus, these are not reasons to give up. We might shake the dust off our feet, we might travel to another town, we might not always see what we define as success, but we are still called to follow and serve Jesus.

Most people set out on their Camino journey with the goal of getting to Santiago, to the Cathedral of St. James, the site where the remains of the Apostle James (the brother of John) are said to reside.

You might think you are ready for the 500-mile walk, but many things stand in the way. Relentless rain. That night when you get not sleep because of the snoring of your fellow pilgrims. Running out of food on your longest walking day. A hotspot on your foot that turns into the biggest, bloodiest blister you have ever seen. But perhaps one of the biggest barriers faced by many on the Camino is called the *meseta*.

The *Meseta* is the name for the high plains on the plateau of central Spain. People complain that it is hot, barren, and flat. Some fear this 130 miles of empty landscape, and wonder if the boredom that comes from it will be the biggest thing that stands in the way of completing the Camino.

Yet for many, traveling through the *meseta* is the part of the journey that bears the greatest treasure for those attending to their inner life. For them, the place of resistance that holds the greatest gift. Think about it, when have you grown most in your life? Has it been in times of happiness and ease, or has it been in times of hardship, struggle, and resistance?

As I approach retirement, I have reflected a lot on my 37 years of pastoral ministry. And I have thought a lot about rejection and resistance, I know that I have found myself intimidated and afraid. There are things that I have not said loudly and clearly enough. There are actions I have chosen not to take. All of this is mostly because I want to be accepted by others. (This may not be your issue but I know it is mine.) And because I faced resistance, because I fear conflict so much—I have at times been timid in my acting and speaking.

I can think of so many ways this has been manifest. I have not really reached out personally to those on the

margins whether it is a young Guatemalan mother in a detention center or a man living in a tent on the Sacramento River. I have not acted boldly enough to counter the rising racism I see in our nation and in my own being. I have not been courageous and loving enough in embracing those I believe that Jesus would embrace. I have not been faithful enough in having honest conversations about faith and life and the reality of God's kingdom with those I call my brothers and sisters.

It seems like it takes little courage to acknowledge the reality of God's kingdom intellectually, but it takes every ounce of courage I have to simply ask God's grace to be part of living out what God wants for this world. I can give you a dozen instances in my life that people might write off as a tired old preacher just looking for a cause. I know that most often I have chosen to embrace the privilege of the life I have been given over risking the rejection of reflecting God's kingdom. I pray that God is changing that in me.

Finally, there is a saying on the Camino and it goes something like this, "The Camino gives you what you need." Countless pilgrims have stories of traveling the Camino de Santiago and finding that when they came upon times of great need or crisis, they were provided for. Another pilgrim shares an orange when you are hungry, a friend has just the right medication when you are facing illness, a hostel appears just as you run out of energy. Sometimes the Camino provides in the form of a necessary word of encouragement or flash of insight. The Camino gives you what you need.

As a Christian, I prefer to think, "God gives us what we need." That is exactly what we see here in this passage. That's the real Good News. Sounding a lot like the Jesus we know from the Gospel of John, Jesus prays,

**I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.<sup>6</sup>**

It is God who reveals to us what is most important, God who provides.

**Then turning to the disciples, Jesus said to them privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings**

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 10:21-22, *NRSV*.

**desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.**<sup>7</sup>

Friends, we are blessed to have such insight. Blessed to know God's will for us. Blessed to experience Jesus' presence as we move through life. God gives us what we need. Life. And knowledge of how to live. We discover it all as we move through our days. This is our journey. This is our Camino. This is our pilgrimage.

Insights and blessings come as we jettison all the things that weigh us down. We travel light. Insights and blessings come as we are willing to receive the welcome of friends and strangers. We receive hospitality. Insights and blessings come as we face rejection with courage. We move through resistance.

The writer of the Gospel of Luke, the book from which we read this day, also wrote the book that comes after the Gospels, We call it the "Acts of the Apostles." It is the story of the early church. In that book, Luke tells us something very important. In Acts 9:2 we are told that one of the very first phrases that was used to describe Jesus' early followers was "people who belonged to the Way."<sup>8</sup> Not Christians. Not people who believed a certain doctrine. But people of the Way.

People who follow a certain leader. People who travel a certain path through life. Pilgrims in search of a Living God. May we too be known as people of the way, and when people see how we travel, may they have some glimpse of God's kingdom. **Amen.**

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## The Next Step

### A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. Have you ever taken any long trips? What is the most important lesson you have learned from traveling?
2. Read Luke 10:1-24 again. What do you find intriguing? What do you find confusing? What really stands out to you?
3. Why do you think Jesus told his disciples to "Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road?" (Luke 10:4) What do you need to let go of to "travel light" on the road of life?
4. Do you enjoy receiving hospitality? It is hard for you to let yourself be served and welcomed by another person? Why do you think Jesus counseled his followers to depend on others as they traveled?
5. Have you ever experienced real rejection? What was that like for you?
6. Are there messages that we bring to the world as followers of Christ that will meet resistance? What are they? Why will they be resisted?
7. Jim talked about how pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago will sometimes say, "The Camino gives you what you need." Have you ever had the experience of the right thing showing up in your life just when you needed it? What was that like?
8. Jesus said to his disciples "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!" (Luke 10:23) What are the blessings? What do we (as disciples) get to see?

#### Table to Table Question

##### A question for kids and adults to answer together

What message does God want you to bring to the world?  
Do you think people will like that message?

<sup>7</sup> Luke 10:23-24, *NRSV*.

<sup>8</sup> Acts 9:2, *NRSV*.