

Mark 6:1-13
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Minneapolis

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Jesus called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics.

As Jesus sent the disciples out on their first mission trip, he gave them a fundamental lesson: when you go in the power of God to do God's work, trust in God and travel light.

Travel light. It's a lesson our twenty youth got when, thanks to your support, they went on pilgrimage to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. They only took what they could carry on their backs on the 110 km. walk. So they left behind many people and many, many things (like phones!) that they might have thought they couldn't live without. We'll hear about their experiences when they preach this fall.

Travel light. After decades I still really haven't gotten the lesson. Why do I drag too much stuff with me? Because I'm anxious: I THINK I might NEED it!

That was my story writ large when I traveled to Honduras in January 1999. It was my first foreign mission trip, my first disaster relief trip. And it was huge. Hurricane Mitch had hit in late October--the most damaging storm of the entire century in that region. Days of relentless rain ravaged the land. Swollen rivers swept rock, trees, houses along with them, destroying communities, killing people and valuable livestock.

Ten of us, seminarians, felt strongly called to go if we could be of help. Several Honduran priests who had studied at Seminary of the Southwest said they could use us in January.

My buddy Posy Jackson and I had signed up. As time drew nearer we got more anxious about what we would find. So we each loaded up on dried food, canned food and other things we **thought** we might need, even a small water purifier each!

I can't imagine what our host priest thought when he came to pick us up in San Pedro Sula: two middle aged women each lugging a suitcase AND large duffle bag? Thank God he didn't know about the provisions that filled the duffles.

The joke was on us.

When we got to his coastal town of Puerto Cortes, we were lodged in a large, airy second-story apartment. Below it was a well-stocked grocery store. It had bottled water and all of the food we could ever need. Even more: they had good red wine and dark chocolate!

When you go in God's spirit to do God's work, you can travel light. Everything you truly need will be provided.

Of course, everything you TRULY need is **not things at all**.

God's work is about relationships, about healing and reconciliation. What is needed for that work is an open heart, keen attention to the people whom we meet, humility, and a willingness to be vulnerable.

Jesus commanded the disciples to travel with NOTHING so that they would be vulnerable and present. They came in pairs to different villages--not as high and mighty healers, not even as peers. They came with their hands open. They had to rely on the kindness of strangers for food and shelter. They had to enter into relationships, seek true hospitality and accept what was offered them. They had to be cared and provided for themselves before they could care for others. They had to become part of a community of trust to become God's instrument for those they were sent to serve.

Traveling as they did, the disciples were stripped of the illusion of self sufficiency. They knew they were radically reliant upon God's gracious provision through the generous hospitality of other people. St. Paul realized that, too. And he wrote to the church in Corinth that God's "grace is sufficient...for power is made perfect in weakness."

Our lives are deeply, truly interdependent. When two or three are gathered in honest humility about our own limitations, we can be more present to the eternal Presence: the healing, reconciling power of God in our midst. When we travel light, when we are not distracted by our electronic devices, not weighted down with worry or with stuff, we connect more deeply with those around us--with their need, and our own.

That's what happened to the disciples.

It's what finally happened to me and Posy in Honduras.

Our host church had a mission community: a village in a remote area. Leaving all of our useless provisions behind we hiked for several hours with the Rector's son to get there. It was the first visit to their mission community since the storm, over two months before.

We were received with surprise and great joy. Then came the sorrow as we were told how the floods had killed many and left survivors with precious little.

Our nominal task was to record the measurements of the villagers so we could return with of clothes and shoes for each one. We did that, of course.

But our ministry, our work, was to be present: attentive, caring for people who had suffered such terror and loss. My Spanish was rudimentary. But I soon realized it didn't matter. I was supposed to LISTEN to their stories, whether I understood or not, to be present lovingly to what they needed to say. That was the most important thing we could give them.

Their priceless gift to us was the gift of themselves. God's spirit dissolved barriers of language, culture, class between us as they welcomed these two grizzled gringas. They entrusted us with the stories of their deep, deep sorrows.

The most poignant moment came when an elderly lady arrived after the others had been tended to. She was a bit breathless. She told us she didn't know we were coming (how could she have?). She apologized for not having prepared refreshments!

We reassured her. And then we listened. Listening, we learned that the storm had taken the life of her only child, a son; he died trying to save the chickens and cow they cared for and relied upon for food. Listening, we realized that she was blind. We had nothing to offer her but our

loving presence, the ears of our hearts. She, in turn offered us the boundless hospitality of **her** heart, her trust and her gratitude.

The genius of Jesus' command to the disciples was that in their need, in their vulnerability, they would have to be present to God's spirit in the communities they visited. They would quickly know whether they found it; if not, they were to move on until they did. They were to stay where they were met with true hospitality: not just food, shelter, and a clean shirt, but the hospitality of the heart and soul--the trust, openness and interdependence where the healing spirit of God in Christ can flourish. They were to join with those communities to nurture and share the abundance of God's spirit.

Spirit nurtures spirit. Trust nurtures trust.

Jesus calls St. John's to be such a community: present in the moment to welcome strangers in our midst with heart and hands, nurturing spirit and trust.

Like the first disciples, Jesus calls us individually to go about every day with humility about our own limitations and an openness to the unity, the interdependence, the oneness that as Richard Rohr wrote, is "pulsing beneath all the distractions and preferences we can create."

Reconciliation and peace come about one encounter at a time. Seeking those encounters, creating those encounters to nurture God's spirit and trust is fundamental to our work as children of God. We do it trusting in God's provision and knowing that God's grace is--truly--all that we need.

And so, dear friends, on this Fourth of July weekend, I wish you a very happy Interdependence Day!