

What to Take with You, What to Leave Behind

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Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

The difference between an enjoyable hike and a miserable hike often comes down to what you take with you, and what you leave behind. Ideally, your backpack will be light enough to not be a burden. So, you don't want to pack it with non-essentials that could have been left behind. On the other hand, you want to make sure that you take with you those supplies that you might regret not having if a situation arose where they would be needed.

What to take with you and what to leave behind is always a judgment call that will vary depending on the nature of the hike you have planned. Factors like weather, terrain and distance need to be taken into consideration. Packing for a hike in the Red Rock Country of Sedona means planning for prolonged exposure to strong sunlight, wind and dry, dry air. So, sunglasses, a hat, sunblock, lip balm and double the amount of water you usually pack, are all vital to take with you. Things like hand warmers and a wool hat are objects that will probably not be missed if you leave them behind.

On his final, fateful hike to Jerusalem, Jesus sent out 70 disciples ahead of him to prepare the way for him. He gave them specific instructions about what to take with them for the journey and what to leave behind. The climate he wanted them to prepare for was not very friendly. "I am sending you out like lambs in the midst of wolves." He told them.

Based on that forecast, you would expect that Jesus would want them to be heavily equipped to fend for themselves in a hostile environment. But, no, Jesus gave them completely different advice. Take no money, no luggage, not even a spare pair of sandals, was what he told them. All those things they were to leave behind.

Then, what *were* they to take with them? A message. And the message was this: The Kingdom of God has come near you.

The very first words from the lips of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospel of Mark are these: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." So, the message the disciples were to take with them on their journey was the same message that Jesus had been packing wherever he went, since the beginning of his ministry.

What Jesus meant by the Kingdom of God coming near was the imminent fulfillment of the time when the purposes of God would be fully realized on earth. The Kingdom of God meant the replacement of poverty with plenty; the removal of injustice to make room for justice for all; the cessation of violence and the commencement of peace; the leaving behind of the curse of suffering and the receiving of universal blessedness. In short, the Kingdom of God meant the fulfillment of the eternal hope that all people could love and be loved by God, and love each other as they love themselves.

That was the message the disciples were to take with them. And to be left behind, was anything that would get in the way of them delivering the Good News they carried. Packing no food or money of their own virtually guaranteed that they would have to seek the hospitality of the homes where they traveled, so that having their own needs met would provide opportunities to share the message with their hosts. The message would be delivered not only with words, but with deeds, like tending to the sick and needy.

Jesus predicted that there would be places that would welcome them and places that would turn them away. But, regardless of the reception they received, the message they were to deliver to rejecters and welcomers alike did not vary. The Kingdom of God has come near you.

Jesus gave special instructions on how they were to respond to those communities that refused to offer them hospitality. “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. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’”

One thing Sue and I learned about hiking in Sedona is that the rust red dust from the trail is not something you want to track into the house with you. Jesus’ instructions for shaking the dust of an unwelcoming place off your feet served a dual purpose. First, it confronted those who rejected them with irrefutable evidence of their inhospitality, allowing them the opportunity to change their ways. Because, if they *had been good hosts* and had the feet of their guests washed, *as good hosts were supposed to*, there would be *no dust on their feet to shake off*.

And, symbolically it was a reminder to the disciples to leave behind them whatever anger and resentment they felt towards those who rejected them, and not carry those feelings in a way that might color their approach to the next place they would visit.

Any time you or I leave the house, there are certain essentials we are careful not to leave behind. Things like our wallets or purses, our keys and our phones. But, as modern-day disciples of Jesus, we also ought to include in our list of what is of utmost importance to take with us when we hit the road, Jesus’ advice to those seventy disciples, about what to take with us and what to leave behind.

Because, we also are meant to carry the message wherever we go-- that the Kingdom of God is near. We are called to be conscientious about bringing healing, kindness and caring into our personal relationships, our casual encounters and our public opinions.

So, nurture the awareness that wherever you go, even in ways you may not understand, you are preparing people to welcome the Kingdom of God. For, we are called to deal with those who wrong us, in a manner consistent with the One whom we claim to represent; leaving behind the dead weight of hurts and resentments that otherwise might color our attitudes about who does and does not deserve to hear the Good News. Jesus has made that decision for us, when he carried the heaviest burden of all—a cross.

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