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Luke 9:1-6, English Standard Version

9 And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, ² and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. ³ And he said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. ⁴ And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. ⁵ And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them." ⁶ And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.

Luke 10:1-12, English Standard Version

10 After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. ² And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³ Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. ⁴ Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' ⁶ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. ⁷ And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. ⁸ Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. ⁹ Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' ¹⁰ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ¹¹ 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' ¹² I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

No staff nor bag in the wormhole

Recently, I was in the Behavioral Health unit at the hospital. I was visiting with a patient whom I had been warned was very psychotic. He wasn't dangerous, of course; they would never let me visit someone who was violent. He was in his thirties, tall and thin. I met him in the hallway of the locked unit, where he had been pacing back and forth, as many of the patients there do. I told him that I was a chaplain and was there to see how he was doing. He looked at me suspiciously and asked me what I wanted from him. I said nothing. I'm not a medical person, I explained, just a chaplain. I was only there to talk. He asked me if I was a priest. I said no, that I'm a Protestant reverend. He nodded and said, "Can I trust you?" I said, "Of course, that's the whole point. I'm a chaplain." Then, as soon as we sat down at a small table to talk, he became very agitated, lowered his voice, and looking to the sides, to see if anyone might be listening, asked me if I wanted to know something very secret. I said sure.

He said, "Have you ever been to Loveland?" I said yes, I pass by it every Sunday on my way to the church that I pastor. He then proceeded to tell me in detail where, in Loveland, I could find the opening to a wormhole. He spoke nonstop for about a half hour, constantly jumping up from his seat, pacing around, making sure no one could overhear us, and then sitting back down. He couldn't

stay still while he sat. His arms were in constant movement. The wormhole, he said, was right by the railroad tracks, near a certain intersection. And given the precision with which he spoke, I suspect that if I knew Loveland better, I could actually have found the wormhole entrance. Then he said that I had to listen carefully to him before I went into the wormhole. I had to bring just the right things with me if I was going to survive the trip through the wormhole. Listen carefully, he repeated.

But let's look at today's Bible passages. The first is from Luke 9. At this point in Luke, Jesus' ministry is expanding, and he is preparing the Apostles to someday go out on their own to spread the word. In our first passage, Jesus is giving instructions to them. He blesses them with the power to heal the sick and to preach the Gospel, and he tells them: *"Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. ⁴And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. ⁵And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them."*

There is one obvious point here. They are to travel light and to not pamper themselves. Their mission is to move quickly and to touch the souls of as many people as possible.

Notice the phrase at the beginning of our passage: *“and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.”* Do you know why the Apostles are called the Apostles, why they were given that title? It comes from the Greek word *apóstolos*, which means “one who is sent out”. That’s why they had to travel light: they were going out, and not to stop anywhere for very long. And they might not ever return.

You might wonder about the statement: *“And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them.”* Sounds like a dopey way to insult someone who has been unkind to you, to shake the dust off your feet in front of them. Where this comes from is that rabbis of this time, if they had been off on a walking journey, and if they might have passed through any pagan areas, they were to shake the dust off their feet to cleanse themselves before reentering the Holy Land.

So, the Apostles had two missions: to heal and to preach. They were to travel light, keep moving, and to not let it bother them if they were rejected somewhere.

Let’s look at our second passage. It has a similar message in it, except that it ends with a warning for towns and villages who reject the evangelists: *“But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say,*
¹¹ ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you.

Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’¹² I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.” The reference to Sodom is obvious: it is the city that was burned to the ground by the hand of God.

By the way, the first passage we looked at has obvious corresponding passages in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, but Luke alone has this second scene. An interesting change here from the first passage is that instead of sending just the twelve Apostles, it says: *After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go.* Now, our passage is from the English Standard Version, and it mentions seventy-two people. However, in at least half of the ancient Greek manuscripts of the Gospel of Luke, it actually says seventy, not seventy-two, and many scholars believe that the true number that appeared in Luke’s Gospel was indeed seventy. This is almost certainly a reference to Moses, who selected seventy to help him lead the people in the wilderness before they entered the Promised Land. Also, you might wonder why the evangelists were told to greet no one on the road. Shouldn’t they be preaching to everyone? There are two answers. One is that their mission was too urgent to tarry. Another answer is that this line echoes a line from Kings 2 of the Old Testament. So, as we have seen in recent weeks, in the Gospels, Jesus does repeatedly echo the Old Testament in his actions,

making it clear that he came to fulfill Old Testament promises made by God to the Chosen People. Jews of the time would have known the dramatic significance of the number seventy: when the Jewish ruling body, the Sanhedrin, had been formed, the Jews had also taken this number from Scripture, and so the Sanhedrin consisted of seventy members.

We see, in this middle section of the Gospel of Luke, that Jesus is setting the foundation for the spreading of the faith, something that will be greatly expanded upon in the other Book that Luke writes, the Acts of the Apostles. One thing to note in these passages is that those who are charged with spreading the news of the New Covenant between God and his people - between God and us - these people are to disregard their safety and comfort. They are to bring no provisions, not even any money, with them, living off whatever is given to them by the people they meet. They are also to enter towns where they might be attacked. Indeed, Jesus warns them: *"I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves."*

But what about us, today? Are we supposed to go out on the road, bringing nothing with us, and preach to the world? Well, no. But we should be prepared to step out of our comfort zone and be open about our faith. We live in a time when the media bashes Christians. On TV we are portrayed as ignorant and mindless,

even hateful. This is a good time for Christians to let those around us know that we are Christians, and to model the kindness, forgiveness, and empathy of Jesus.

Let me get back to the young man who was giving me detailed instructions on how to find the wormhole in Loveland. He was so sincere and so intense, that I was half tempted to take notes, so that later, I could find the wormhole entrance. But seriously, he told me that the trip through the wormhole was a long one, and that I would get knocked around pretty hard. I would need a hoodie, to pad my head. I would need to bring warm clothing with me, because although the trip would start out in warm weather, by the time I got to the other end, it would be very, very cold. I would need food, of course, because it was a long trip. He did tell me that U.S. money would not do me any good when I got there, but that I should bring gifts to hand out as a sign of friendship.

He didn't tell me if the people there would be nice or if they might try to hurt me. He didn't say anything about what I would find at the other end of the wormhole. I had been hoping that he would describe the folks who lived there and what their universe looked like. His biggest concern was that I be prepared, with a backpack stuffed with the things I would need to survive the journey. He did say one more thing to me, though, and thinking about this interaction with him is what caused me to use these two passages from Luke today. At the end of our talk, he

lowered his voice and confided in me that there was a special reason why he was letting me know the location of the wormhole entrance. He said that he wasn't a Christian, but that he knew that a reverend would behave himself and give a good impression of what human beings are like. He said that people on earth are terrible, that they treated him awfully. He said that when he spoke to people, no one wanted to talk to him, that they would run away from him, that they would call the cops to come and get him off the street. That was why he was in the hospital, he said: someone told the police to lock him up somewhere. That was when he made the most sense to me, when he was telling me how the world had rejected him. Then he said that there was no way he would tell all those people out there how to find the entrance to the wormhole. He wanted to send someone who would make people on earth look good.

Notice something from the middle of our second quote. Jesus says to his seventy: *"Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!'"* ⁶*And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you.* ⁷*And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages."* Notice that Jesus is telling his disciples, the people who will represent him after he leaves, that they should offer peace to the households they enter. And if you look at these lines carefully, you'll see that Jesus

is saying that they should work for people, that they should be useful. That's why it's okay for them to eat and drink what is provided for them, because a laborer deserves his wages. That work might be simply to preach. It could be to heal. It could be to help around the house in their spare time. But they were to be a blessing to those whom they visited.

So, I suggest that as you enter the wormhole this week, don't worry about being prepared. Don't focus on taking care of yourself. Focus on taking care of others. You might have a rough ride this week. You never know what will happen. Someone in your family might get sick or hurt. Someone might lose a job. You might be mistreated. Perhaps you'll suddenly be confronted with a huge bill of some sort. Medical costs alone drive a lot of people into bankruptcy. Who knows what will happen to you in the wormhole. But if we spend all our time trying to prepare and to protect ourselves, we won't enjoy the journey and we won't be in the right mindset when we get to the other end. We need to focus on being Christians in a very non-Christian world.

There's a reason why Jesus wants those whom he sends out to not bring anything with them, another reason besides being able to travel light and move quickly. By bringing nothing with them, they will be totally dependent upon others, and this will force them to interact with the people they meet. We have become

too independent in America, too isolated, and too preoccupied with being self-sufficient. We need to enter the wormhole with no staff and no bag. The psychotic man at the hospital needed medicine and wasn't thinking properly. I would have made a better evangelist to the aliens at the other end of the wormhole if I had arrived with nothing and was therefore totally dependent upon them.