

Sermon for Year B Proper 10
July 16, 2006
St. Mary of the Hills, Blowing Rock, NC
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The Buddy System

*The ants go marching two by two,
The little one stops to tie her shoe,
And they all go marching down to the ground
To get out of the rain, BOOM! BOOM!*

Some of you are of the age, and of the great musical sophistication,
to remember that song...*The Ants Go Marching*.

And somehow this week, having read and prayed with Mark's gospel,
about Jesus sending the disciples out two by two,
that song kept spinning around in my head.

Jesus called the twelve and began to send them out two by two...

They say our chances of success with a diet or an exercise program
or almost any discipline
increases dramatically, if we have a buddy,
a friend who will do it with us.

Jesus sends the disciples out two by two.
Any journey goes better with a friend along.

Because if one of you gets discouraged,
the other is there to cheer you along.

Because if one of you wants to turn around and go home,
the other is there to say, let's just go one more day.

Jesus tells the disciples to travel light,
to take nothing but a staff—no money, no bread,
no suitcase full of clean clothes—
just strap on your sandals and go.

There is an echo here
back to when the Hebrew people were being readied for freedom
from their oppression in Egypt:
*Your sandals on your feet, your staff in your hands...*¹

Be ready to go.
When God calls, be ready.

¹ Exodus 12:11

Jesus is telling the disciples that the work is not done.
Jesus is telling them be ready,

Go, says Jesus.
Go together.

The sandals, of course, make the miles of walking a little easier.
The staff offers some protection against enemies
and serves as an aid for walking over rough terrain.

The staff is also a symbol of power and authority.²
A symbol of the power and authority Jesus entrusts to the disciples.

But even with that power and authority,
it can still be a very unsettling feeling to travel light.

To leave the security of our “stuff” behind.
What if the strap on my sandals breaks and I need another pair of shoes?
I think people might be a lot more impressed with what I am saying,
if I could show up in that really sharp black suit,
or that nice purple jacket.

Nope.
Just sandals and a staff. A simple tunic.
(And don’t try to double up and sneak on a second tunic!)

When we free ourselves of our possessions,
things do not get in the way
of who we are and what we say.
When we free ourselves of our possessions
we discover how much more we need one another,
how much more we feel God’s presence.

Eugene Peterson writes in *The Message*,
his contemporary language translation of the Bible:

Jesus says,
“Don’t think you need a lot of extra equipment for this.
***You are the equipment.**”³*

You are the equipment.

² Exodus 4:20

³ Roger E. Van Harn, *The Lectionary Commentary: Theological Exegesis for Sunday’s Texts, The Third Readings: The Gospel* (Grand Rapids Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), page 215.

I am not good at traveling light.
My husband Tom can heartily witness to that.
But when I recently went to Wales,
 knowing that I was going to be traveling on trains and buses and walking,
 knowing I would not have a car and could not afford taxis--
And especially knowing
 that I was the only person who would be around to carry what I brought,
I decided to give traveling light a try.

I ordered a small rolling duffle bag from L. L. Bean.
When Tom saw it and I told him that was all I was taking,
 he burst out laughing. And he laughed a long time!!

But I did it.
 (Well, I did have a small carry on shoulder bag, too—
 mostly to accommodate the books I had to take).
Packing so light was incredibly anxious for me.
But the results were amazing.
Rather than so much attention going towards my luggage and an assortment of clothes,
 life was pretty simple.
I felt a lot more vulnerable.
I was the equipment.
But the people I met on the journey were amazing—
 I walked from the train station to the bus station
 with a young man from New Zealand who was in Wales to shear sheep.
As I sat on the bench at another bus station,
 I talked with a woman who told me about her father
 who has Alzheimer's Disease and how much she loves him.

I don't know if the people I met were a result of
 traveling light.
I just know that I felt different.
 Less burdened.
 More open hearted.

We put so much value in what we have and what we own and what we can buy,
 In what we wear and what we drive,
 And over and over and over,
 Jesus tells us,
 That STUFF you work so hard for?
 It doesn't really matter at all.
 Try traveling a little lighter.

Love is what we are called to pack for the journey.
And love is amazingly compact.
Love God. Love one another.
That is the message we are called to take into our hearts
 And to share with other hearts in the world.

The message today
is that it will be tough going, if not impossible,
if we take a “lone ranger” approach;
we need other people in our lives.
(Can you imagine trying to do the Tour of Homes by yourself!??)

The disciples are a community.
So are we.
The disciples go out—not alone—
but two by two.
The disciples go out
and they come back-- together.

Sandals, a staff, and one another.
That’s what we need to do God’s work in the world,
to make the journey

Jesus calls the twelve and began to send them out two by two.
Jesus calls us.

A staff of power and authority is given to us every Sunday
when we reach out our hands and receive the bread,
and drink the cup.

We do not come and receive one at a time.
We come up the aisle together,
sometimes two by two.

We kneel together.
We receive our bread for the journey side by side.
And none of us gets the whole loaf.
We each receive only a small piece,
broken from the whole.

Some of you have heard this story before but I think it is worth retelling.
My first Sunday at seminary,
I went to the Church of the Epiphany in downtown Washington, DC.
The priest invited the congregation to communion with these words:

*In a world so broken my unshared bread,
I invite you—all of you—to God’s table,
where there is always bread enough for everyone.*

Jesus calls us to trust
that there will be enough.

We don't need to pack our own bread supply.
We will be fed. All of us.

In our receiving,
in our sharing,
in our going out together
into the world,
it happens.
All those pieces of broken bread
come together and are made whole once more.