

Jesus's Travel Tips

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Mark 6:7-13 — Jesus called the twelve apostles 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. Jesus said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” So the twelve apostles went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

By the time we get to Mark 6, Jesus has become quite the big shot. He started out teaching in the local synagogues, but quickly outgrew those venues, so he started preaching to crowds outdoors, and traveling from town to town. Everywhere he went, people followed him, and with every message, every healing, every stop along his preaching tour, the number of onlookers and followers grew. In last Sunday's reading, from Mark 5, we saw that even as Jesus was just walking down a street, he was surrounded by a packed mob, hanging on his every word and deed.

But then, in chapter 6, the scene changes drastically, as Jesus returns to his hometown. Turns out, the people in his old neighborhood of Nazareth aren't exactly fans of this big shot Jesus. He shares a message in the humble synagogue of his childhood, and to his surprise, everyone takes offense. They start to murmur: *Who does he think he is?* Afterwards, Jesus says, “Prophets never lack honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.”

I can empathize with those words. Robert and I just got back from a trip to my hometown in Texas, where I have two home churches—one in which we feel welcome, and the other in which we do not. In the eyes of many within the non-denominational evangelical church where I spent my high school years, I am not an honorable pastor, nor even an honorable Christian, but rather a heathen, a fake Christian. In their eyes, I excommunicated myself from the true faith the moment I decided to identify as gay, and I will remain an outcast, a lost soul, a second-class citizen for as long as I'm in a relationship with the person I love.

Even if you've never been in a situation quite like this, I'm guessing that you know at least a bit of what Jesus was going through here in Mark 6. I'm guessing you know what it's like when your journey through life takes you to a place where you'd like to feel at home, but where you don't. Maybe it's because you don't feel well understood or well cared for, maybe it's because you're so busy or so burdened that you just can't seem to settle in or relax, but whatever the reasons, you know what it's like to travel through rough terrain or hostile territory—and you

know what it's like to long for what the psalmist calls "green pastures and still waters": a place of peace, a state in which you can be content.

And in our second reading, right after getting rejected by the community of his upbringing, Jesus offers us some guidance for when we're traveling through those rough or hostile parts of our journeys. Let's call it three travel tips from Jesus, originally given to his twelve apostles as he's sending them out for ministry, but also given to all of us as we are sent out on our respective journeys.

Tip #1: "Take nothing for your journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in your belts." In other words, travel lightly. Don't carry a lot of baggage with you. When you're tempted to get more and more, to bring more and more, bring less instead. This is counter-intuitive advice in our consumer-driven, capitalist culture. Especially when our journeys are hard, when we're going through something rough and are feeling vulnerable, we're eager to stock up, to take as much as we can, to fight for the security we crave. But Jesus knows that going this route often leads only to more burdens, and it paradoxically robs us of the contentment that we long for. Jesus knows that when we carry little, we have little to lose, and when we have little to lose, we aren't so darn stressed out about losing it. There's an old, old hymn that begins, "'Tis a gift to be simple, 'tis a gift to be free." And those two things are very much related, I think: simplicity in life, in schedules, and in possessions can be a path to freedom, even to joy. Now, the idol of our country's economy doesn't want us to think too much about that...but it seems that Jesus does.

Tip #2: "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place." That is, when you come to a new town, don't hop from household to household; rather, find a family that works, a family that welcomes you, and stick with them for as long as you're there. In other words, during those rough parts of your journey, figure out who your friends are, then keep them close. Even if you're only in a place for a short amount of time, don't be afraid to plant roots in relationships. Whatever your journey looks like at any given point, remember to carve out time and space for friends, to be with the people who help you grow and with whom you can feel safe and loved. Jesus encourages us to stick with those people, because he knows that such friendships are essential to our well-being in mind, body, and spirit.

Lastly, tip #3: "If any place will not welcome you, and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." In other words, when someone treats you with disrespect, when someone doesn't give you a fair hearing, when someone seems bent on making your life miserable, *shake. it. off.* (Just like the great theologian Taylor Swift taught us to do.) Now, that doesn't mean you should just pretend like you haven't been hurt or wronged. There's always a time and a place to address mistreatment. In fact, anger at injustice is a common theme throughout the Bible. The Hebrew prophets routinely railed against those kings who cared more about their military's prestige, about their horses and chariots, than about the poor in their midst, and God never told them to just shake it off. And yet, there is a way in which we are meant to let go of the mistreatment we've suffered. We aren't

meant to carry all those wrongs around with us, to feel constantly burdened by them, to let them rob us of joy. If it's someone else's dirt that sticking to us, then as best we can, let's get rid of it.

Friends, the journey is long, and often it's hard. Not every stop along the road feels like home, and some stops feel like downright hostile territory. But the good news for us this morning is that Jesus knows what that's like, and he invites us to follow in his footsteps: to travel lightly, to keep our friends close, and to shake it off. Amen.