

Let us pray together: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

In the early 80s, Linda and I moved to Vancouver, WA. My new job there involved traveling all over the United States taking me away from home Monday through Friday. Linda had also started a new job. After several months of this new routine, we decided it was time to get away together and forget about the weekend household chores.

Vancouver, Washington, a city just across the river from Portland, Oregon, put us in close proximity to Oregon's beautiful coastline. Friends had recommended a bed and breakfast near a small town on the Oregon coast and we decided to take their recommendation. An excellent recommendation it was! The home was perched on a cliff overlooking the Pacific. The view out the windows of our room was spectacular – green trees, miles of rugged coastline with waves crashing on the rocks.

When we checked into the B&B, we inquired about a place for dinner that evening and were directed to drive into the small coastal town and look for a restaurant called Rosanna's. The food there was excellent, we were told, the best cooking in the area. The place had a great reputation among foodies.

When dinner time came we drove from the B&B down the hill into the small, not too prosperous looking downtown with quite a few weathered, rundown buildings. We began to wonder how such a fine dining establishment could be found here. As we drove through town, making a couple of passes down the main street, we finally found a broken down, weathered building with a small sign that displayed the name of restaurant. Could this place actually provide us a gourmet meal? We had faith in the recommendation of the B&B owners and stepped inside.

I'm happy to tell you that that restaurant did indeed provide us with an excellent meal. Their grilled oysters serve as the standard by which I compare other restaurants' grilled oysters. And oysters were not the only excellently prepared dish on the menu. We were not disappointed! And we have returned many times to enjoy the gourmet fare there. In fact, this past March when we were in Oregon, we went out of our way to eat at this restaurant once again.

I provide our dining example as a contrasting illustration to what happened to the people who lived in Jesus' home town of Nazareth. They rejected Jesus and missed his message. They couldn't get passed what they thought they knew. Wasn't Jesus just one of the local carpenters, the son of Mary and Joseph, a

hometown boy. Wasn't this the Jesus they had watched grow up? How could he offer them anything?

For us, we accepted the outward appearance of the restaurant building, shabby as it was, walked inside and enjoyed a great meal. We certainly got to know the restaurant.

The people in Nazareth weren't willing to see beyond their small world, beyond appearances, beyond what they thought they knew. Unfortunate for them and for those today who reject Jesus without trying to understand his message.

Jesus used this hometown experience to teach his disciples as our scripture lesson shifts from the hometown experience to sending out the disciples two by two. If you are rejected shake the dust off your feet and move on, Jesus told them.

What struck me about this next section of the scripture was Jesus' instruction to travel light as he sent the disciples out to teach in the villages. Take nothing for the journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money and only one pair of sandals and one tunic.

Perhaps Jesus knew about airport security in 2018. If you want to get through security without any problems, then it is best to not carry anything but the clothes on your back when you go through the scanners! And be sure and empty your pockets! Like the TSA, Jesus had prohibited items.

But there was a reason for Jesus' instruction to travel light. Taking too much along could undermine the mission he was sending the disciples on. Think about it. If you had to pack so you could wear something different each day, just consider the amount of time that takes up to plan that and how much luggage you would need to carry it all. The disciples would need a donkey to carry all that baggage! And how would the villager's perception of such well-dressed disciples affect the message the disciples were teaching? It's a bit like our TV evangelist and how people talk about how well they are dressed. "That suit must have cost a fortune!" is a comment heard followed by another comment about the money the ministry must be taking in to support such lavish clothing. Such comments lead to discounting the message and ministry of that person.

Now, I'm not telling you to wear only one tunic and sandals. That's not possible in our world today to travel that light. Society today is structured differently from Jesus' day. The weather is not the same in all parts of the world were Christians are sharing the message of God's love as expressed through Jesus Christ. You may just need that coat you packed in your bag when the temperature drops below freezing.

The question to ask is ‘why take nothing for the journey’? When Jesus sent the disciples out into the world, he realized if they were to be successful they needed to rely on him, not on what they had along with them. The disciples could not be fully present, doing the job Jesus sent them out to do if they were worrying about clothes or what to eat or how to pay for things.

What might be standing in the way of your traveling light as you share Jesus’ message with those you meet on the road of life? Are you carrying extra baggage in our life that prevents you from depending on Jesus entirely? Are there things in your past that are interfering with your living a life committed to Christ?

Such baggage could be unproductive ways of dealing with conflict or unaddressed fears or the scars of abuse. It could be cynicism, contempt, anger, prejudice or just plain fatigue. Are there holdovers from your past and other issues that are getting in the way of your relationship with Jesus? I don’t want to emphasize this point too much. You and God know if you do have issues and I would urge you to seek professional help if needed.

The point here for many of us is that we let these issues hold us back. The disciples all had issues. The Bible clearly states that. They were jealous of each other. Some took more than their share of money. When it was convenient, they lied about their relationship with Jesus. Yet, Jesus used the disciples to do the work he called them to do. In spite of their shortcomings, they were still able to cast out demons and heal the sick. Let me repeat that. In spite of their shortcomings, they were still able to cast out demons and heal the sick – to do the work Jesus sent them to do.

Jesus can use you, as the phrase goes, ‘warts and all.’ In spite of your shortcomings. You just have to depend on him – not on yourself. Have you talked with Jesus about those things that are blocking you from serving him fully?

It seems the villagers in Nazareth had things blocking them from seeing who Jesus was. They were carrying prejudices and past beliefs, baggage, that prevented them from seeing God right in front of them. They could not shed their ‘issues’ and listen to and accept Jesus as the Son of God. They were certainly not capable of traveling light!

Jesus wants us to travel light, to shed our prejudices, unproductive beliefs and the issues that prevent us from depending on Jesus for all we need for the journey. Jesus sent the disciples out into the world to teach and heal. Likewise, Jesus sends us out into the world to teach and heal. If we are to be successful, we need to rely on him. By relying on him we can be fully present and do the job we’re sent to do. So, shake the dust off your feet and journey on.