

Whenever we travel, Deb and I are usually pretty light packers - taking only enough clothes for 3 or 4 days, planning to stop along the way and do a wash every 3 or 4 days. This means that we can usually get along with a suitcase apiece and a carry-on for computers, cameras and other paraphernalia.

Traveling through airports is so much simpler when we don't have lots of extra baggage. But I am not sure if I could do what Jesus told the disciples to do:

Go on your way.  
Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals;  
and greet no one on the road.  
Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you,  
eat what is set before you;  
cure the sick who are there, and say to them,  
'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' [From Luke 10]

Jesus wants the seventy to take far less than I could get along with, as in nothing—no money, no anything— just what they happen to be wearing. They are to be dependent on the kindness of strangers. My control issues are a little strong for that. I'd probably at least stuff some underwear and shampoo into my pockets and hope he wouldn't notice.

These followers are sent out as lambs among wolves; they will find out just who their friends are. Their friends are the ones who will welcome them, whether they are known to each other or not. It is very likely that Jesus instructed his disciples to emulate his own pattern of activity. Whenever travelling it seemed he would come to a town, then would need to find a place to sleep and some food. The pattern he sets out is that of travelling as poor people, but unlike the wandering Cynic teachers of his day, they do not carry a begging bag. Instead they were to come only with who they were and await local response. Larger Palestinian houses had sort of porches and one could freely enter the front half of the house from outside – it was public space. These disciples would then face the owners with the choice of hospitality and enjoying the benefits of the kingdom and its healing and teaching or of turning away these uninvited would-be guests.

The ancient world had strong customs about hospitality. You either welcomed these people or you turned them away. It was accepted that enemies should not be offered hospitality, but were these enemies or friends? They claimed to be instruments of peace and wholeness, including healing. They claimed to be announcing the reign of God and by their actions, bringing its reality into life in the here and now. To receive them was to receive the one who sent them and to receive him was to receive God, to be open to the kingdom. To reject someone who is not an enemy, to refuse to offer hospitality, was shameful. It brought disgrace and promised misfortune. Reject these messengers and you reject Jesus; reject Jesus and you reject God;

There are 3 things the disciples will find out on the journey:

First their message will not be received by everyone. Jesus knows that even though in ancient Palestine hospitality is highly valued, not everyone will welcome you, even when you bring peace. So when someone is not interested – move on. And when they are – receive what they have to offer.

And that is the second thing that Jesus teaches the seventy two: receive whatever hospitality is offered. That seems strange for us. We expect to be told to share hospitality, not to look to receive it. How happy we are when someone thanks us for a nice meal or is grateful to have a place to stay. When the worshiping community extends hospitality to the stranger, the person on the margins, the immigrant, that community finds itself warmed and renewed by the act of giving.

And yet, receiving is also a gift to oneself and to the giver. Some of the most memorable moments I've ever experienced happened in some of the strangest places, Ten years ago In Jerusalem where the town was gripped in the aftermath of an act of destruction they offered a simple cup of tea. Or on the side of the road in the Dominican Republic 40 years ago, a family that lived day to day – hand to mouth offered a meal of homemade bean tortillas, bananas and papayas picked from village trees, and ice cold Coke bought from the local tienda. Thousands of miles from home, I was served simple meals that transcended language and culture with there hospitality and welcome. It was more than I could have asked or expected, and it made me feel safe and welcomed.

The third thing he taught the disciples was the power of partnership - of cooperating and supporting one another. Jesus knew what he was doing when he sent out the seventy in twos. We don't have to go to a foreign country to be on the journey together. We share memories and adventures. Sometimes we remember the wolves, and can laugh together at the ones who were mean but not really dangerous.

We encourage each other to watch out for the truly alarming. But mostly, we talk about those wonderful situations where we were given incredible hospitality, where we were welcomed. Sometimes it is hard for us to accept those gifts of hospitality, for we have been trained to give rather than to receive. But Jesus wanted the seventy to know the joy of receiving.

Go on your way.

See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.

Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road.

Luke 10:3-4

Oh, and there is one final thing that Jesus taught the disciples: When he sent them out, wherever they went whatever they did to heal and to help, whatever they said that made whole again, when they gave and when they received, to remember this: the kingdom of God has indeed come near. In what we do and say, go out – share the good news – give and especially receive. The kingdom of God has indeed come near.