

The Reverend Dr. Randall K. Bush
East Liberty Presbyterian Church
July 8, 2012

“Taking Everything We Need”

Mark 6:1-13

Read the scripture online (NSRV): <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=208717930>

This past week has been a crazy one for me. We had the wonderful worship service last Sunday, a week of hot, humid weather, the General Assembly meeting at the convention center, trying to get packed and ready for our time in New Zealand, plus preparing for this morning’s communion service. Let me take a moment to comment briefly on each of those items. 1) Most of you were present for last Sunday’s worship service, in which over 800 Presbyterian friends and family filed into our sanctuary. It was a fun service, with the brass sextet, the commissioned piece, the congregation’s robust singing of the hymns, the children, the video, receiving a really big offering, the box lunch and ice cream...it was a good day all around. To Heather, Ed, and Patrice, the whole church staff, the choir, the security and housekeeping and administrative staff: Thank you! We modeled for the church what it means to be church, in all our diversity and inclusivity and creativity. It was also inspiring to realize that we are not alone, that there are other progressive, socially-active Presbyterians anxious to move beyond narrow definitions of faith, so that the full gospel of Christ—love, justice, passion—can be shared in our troubled world. When I describe our church to others, I always mention our commitment to four pillars of faith: creative worship, education for all ages, mission that takes the love of Christ into the community and the world, and spiritual disciplines that nurture our souls for the journey ahead. Worship, education, mission, spiritual life: during the coming weeks, make sure that your lives are shaped by those four pillars of faith.

2) What can be said about the weather? We live in an age of global warming, or as Thomas Friedman has called it, global weirding, as weather records are broken by new highs, vicious storms, and other signs that we are fundamentally damaging the only home we possess. The hot weather forces us to slow down and take siestas. It also makes us reevaluate what really matters in life: how ill-prepared we are for long exposure to harsh weather conditions, even as many in our community have to work under conditions or live in places that are unhealthy and dehumanizing. Let us keep one another in prayer.

3) General Assembly concluded yesterday after working Friday night until 1:30 in the morning, so there were a lot of sleepy Presbyterians making their way home on Saturday. Our Presbytery did an excellent job in hosting the assembly. And from a faith perspective, the Assembly had some positive moments in it. As you hopefully know, in 2010, the Assembly voted by a narrow margin of 53%-47% to have Presbyteries vote on removing the discriminatory language that prevented gay and lesbian Presbyterians from living into their call from God to serve as deacons, elders and ministers. That language was successfully removed last year. This General Assembly, by a strong, two-



thirds majority, voted to reject going back to the old, homophobic language and thus supported our new, more inclusive ordination standards.

This General Assembly also voted to support our Presbyterian Board of Pensions as it provides coverage for same-gender couples enrolled in the Pension plan. This Assembly voted to have Presbyteries consider a new translation of the Heidelberg Catechism that removes inaccurate, anti-gay language from the existing version in our Book of Confessions. Unfortunately, the Assembly did not act to correct the language in our Book of Order so that ministers serving congregations in states where same gender marriages are legal are able to perform such marriages, but instead decided we should study this issue for two more years. While that's a disappointment, overall it was a good assembly.

It was a General Assembly in which much of the truth of Mark 6:1-6 was evident, how prophets are not honored or listened to when they speak up in their home communities, or, in this case, when they speak up surrounded by their own denomination. For example, carefully reasoned calls for divestment from American companies that profit from unjust practices used by Israel against Palestine were rejected by a very narrow margin. However, remember that we are called to speak and teach and work for change, because if our goal is just and God's will, we know that right will eventually prevail.

4) Yes, my family and I are pretty well packed for our three month stay in New Zealand. Do we have everything we need? I doubt it. We are going from hot summer into cold winter weather. We are traveling more than halfway around the world and will undoubtedly arrive in our destination and say, "Oh, I wish I'd packed this and not packed that." The kids will need school uniforms; Beth and I will be seeking out pianos for practicing. The food will be different: Vegemite instead of peanut butter, and the accent will be quite different. Are we taking everything we need? Well, what advice does Mark's gospel give us?

Mark 6: Jesus called together the twelve disciples and sent them out two by two. We're OK in this category, because our family is basically traveling as two groups of two. Whether in modern times or Jesus' time, people traveling in pairs or small groups can help look out for one another; and often their shared message will be heard better than if it came from a single voice or arose from a single person's experiences. Remember: 1+1 equals more than 2; it equals the church.

What else? Jesus ordered the disciples to take nothing for their journey except a staff and sandals; no bread, no bag, no money, no extra tunics. OK, I didn't do so well in following these instructions. We've got 5 big bags plus carry-ons; no bread but some snacks and granola bars; and I don't want to admit how many extra tunics I stuffed into my suitcase. Jesus wants his disciples to travel light; the airline industry has defined "light" as anything under 50 pounds, so I confess that I followed the gospel of Air New Zealand more than the gospel of Mark.



What is Jesus telling us here? As we go through life, we should travel light. Don't store up for yourself treasures on earth, where rust, moths and thieves can take them. Don't travel around as if you were totally self-sufficient on your own, needing neither God nor other people to make it on your particular journey. Travel knowing that all you are and all you have and all you need come from the Lord. Learn to see your possessions as part of a larger heavenly treasure entrusted to you for the time being. Learn to recognize how anything you need must necessarily come to you through God's providence and care, both directly and indirectly.

If you travel aware of God in this way, you will be changed by your journey. If you travel aware of God in this way, the people you meet, who will necessarily offer you food and water, guidance and hospitality, will also be changed by your journey. This approach of "walking the faith walk" means you're putting into actions the words of what you believe, rather than shouting threats of hellfire through megaphones as a way to coerce conversions from those you meet along life's way. Remember: the gospel has been given to us to share, and only sometimes do we use words to share it.

Will our journey be ever smooth? Of course not. The journey of life travels through dark valleys and up rocky slopes and down shadowy back roads. Some people we meet will reject us and reject the faith that sustains us. Still we must go on. Others will welcome us, often with questions of their own and experiences of God that can teach us. There we should linger and learn with humble and grateful hearts.

Hopefully as we travel (whether to New Zealand or wherever God leads you in the coming three months), there will be time to make music, to pray, to see the wonders of God's creative genius, and to share simple meals of bread, wine and Holy Spirit. Just like what is spread out here for us this day. It looks so minimal, compared to what might have been spread out before us. It's as spartan as the packing instructions Jesus gave to his disciples before sending them out two by two. But it really is all you need.

Do we have everything for New Zealand? Are we taking everything we need? Let me look around first, and share a bite to eat with you, and say a prayer together as Christ's family. And, then, I can confidently answer: Yes, we have everything we need. Thanks be to God.

AMEN

