

## PACKING ESSENTIALS

Matthew 4:1-11

13 March 2011

The young woman confessed to not being a light packer. That will do for an understatement until something better comes along. She got caught with her luggage in a revolving door once. Taxi drivers charge her for the bags that have to go inside the cab as well as



in the trunk. At the check in and weigh your bags station in the airport, they have to order extra “Caution: Heavy” stickers when she flies and the question is, will any given bag weigh over 50 pounds or come in at, say 48.8? Her most common statement on surveys of airport personnel forms is her question, “Do they all have to say, ‘Wow, how much luggage does one person really need for a week end?’”

In relating the problems with being an over packer, she claims innocence of any mistakes. She really thought buying a suitcase that proudly advertised it could hold an entire wardrobe was a good idea. “Well, after all,” she mused, “that way I’d only have one bag to keep up with.” The fact that the one bag would weigh in excess of 80 pounds did not occur to her until after packing. At 110 pounds, she wasn’t moving that bag anywhere. It isn’t that she takes things she does not use. She confesses to wearing, in one week end, four pairs of cargo pants, ten t-shirts, four pairs of shoes, and all the accessories. A dress and coat, she takes two in different colors. This is a real person but could be a real guy I also know. Some of today’s commercials ask what’s in your wallet. Today’s question for us, is “What’s in your luggage?”

Hiking the Boy Scout reservation out in New Mexico requires simple packing. Eleven days in country with all your food, water, and equipment on your back changes the packing perspective. Clothing is reduced to two pairs of socks, pants, underclothes, and shirts. That is not extra, that is total, one to wear and a spare. The need for essentials means that other things are quickly left behind.

World traveling back packers have a remarkable consensus on what to take and what not to take. According to my nephew Michael, of world backpacking fame in our extended family, you need: a driver's license or another photo ID, passport, satellite cell phone because they have accessories that let you leave behind so much, a phone recharger with outlet adaptor, cash, credit or ATM cards, some type of rain gear and good shoes. What you do not need for back packing is a laptop, hiking boots that will take you across the Kalahari desert (unless that is your destination), leave the Swiss Army Knife on your bureau at home, expensive clothes, a guitar, or a pack that looks like you are a Navy Seal, unless you are in fact, a Navy seal. In other words, go light, go for essentials. Even if you are not back packing, going light when traveling is a good idea. Friends of ours packed for a two week stay on the GulfCoast. They bought a case of water

to drink on the beach. They bought the case in Memphis. Seems they forgot there are Sam's Clubs on the Gulf Coast. Pack the essentials.

Jesus, in today's gospel packs light. He packs the essentials. He will fast there in the wilderness, in good Jewish tradition. That means he carries no pot or pan, no camp stove and no spork (or its opposite, the foon, if such a thing existed). He will not need any distractions, so the first century equivalents of books, cell phones, and all other such burdens are left behind. He leaves the excess behind. He simply leaves the place of his baptism and goes. That is an impressive way to travel. "Don't stop to cancel the mail, wind the cat or put out the clock, just go." We may learn from that to simply pack the essential.

Pack the essentials for your Lenten journey. Pack the essentials for your spiritual pilgrimage, moving from a child in the faith to a mature relationship with the One. Temptation, though, is there. The temptation is to take far more than we need. The temptation is **to take care of our salvation on our own**. The temptation is **to make sure that we are loved, appreciated and respected**. The temptation is to **make sure that God is on our side**. When we give in to those temptations, we turn away from God and we turn toward brokenness. When we turn away from rebellion, though, away from self-centeredness and turn away from distrust of God, then we pack light. Then we get down to the essentials. Then we follow Jesus.

Those of you who have been in church for a while know this story well. Jesus, led out into the wilderness by the Spirit, is tempted. The opening sentence gives us instruction on what to pack and what to leave behind. Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit. Jesus goes where the spirit leads. Why not go home and have a celebration? Jesus had just been baptized. His life was blessed by the God of heaven and earth who boomed from heaven, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." Why not have celebrations, parties inaugurating the coming time of preaching, teaching, healing, and restoring? The short answer is that God told Jesus to go into the wilderness. Will Jesus pack a bag with trust and obedience and trust? Will he pack a bag of ego? What he does sets the precedent for us, both as individuals and as the church. What will he pack?



Jesus first packs trust in God's directions. What happens when we do not follow the simple rules? Consider two flights of two space shuttles. In October 2002, the space shuttle Atlantis suffered a piece of insulation that broke off and damaged a solid rocket booster. Still, the flight went ahead. There was little follow-up or investigation. Later, the shuttle Columbia suffered a piece of insulation breaking off and damaging the shuttle's left wing. The shuttle and its seven-person crew were destroyed on re-entry. The disaster resulted in the suspension of shuttle flights and a major investigation that led to 29 recommended changes to prevent future calamities. According to a Study published in the Academy of Management Journal, which

studied NASA's response, "Larger or more devastating failures can often be prevented by paying attention to small mistakes and fixing the underlying problems."

If we begin any journey, any effort, any exercise without seeking God's direction, then we will be packing failure. The failure will come as sure as the sun rises. The failure might not come at once, but failure to pack God's directions will set us on a course that ultimately destroys us and all of our work. Jesus teaches us this essential packing lesson when he follows the lead of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested. Begin with God and your packing becomes a simple process.

What Jesus packs after first packing trust in God is response to that first decision. The testing that comes can be dealt with because Jesus first trusts. The subtlety of the tempter is great, but Jesus can cope and teach us what to pack for our time of testing, our spiritual pilgrimage.

Will you pack a life full of self-importance? Listen to the tempter. "Jesus, buddy, pal, you're hungry; hunger is natural. Turn the stones into bread." That is a subtle, crafty test. Jesus will, later, seem to create both bread and fish from a miracle, so why not now? The answer is because that such a response causes Jesus to pack his bag with the abuse of his power and misuse of his position for his own comfort. Jesus shows us that we use our position, power and influence, and every one of you has some of all of those, to advance the care of those worse off than you are, not simply to make life ever more comfortable for ourselves. We do that even when a situation involving our own comfort seems rather urgent. Jesus shows us that we do not allow a tyranny of the urgent to take us away from the path of the important.

According to the news report; "Mark Carlile crawled blindly through a burning trailer, listening for the sounds of children crying, feeling for signs of life. Smoke filled his lungs. Heat seared his face. "I've walked a lot of beams, but this was the scariest thing I have ever done,"



Carlile, an ironworker, said of his heroic trek through smoke and flames on Saturday morning. "I was not going to come out of there without those babies." With the two young children's parents standing dazed outside their Folsom trailer home, Carlile, 48, took charge, pushing through the front door and into a wall of heat and flames. Minutes later, he emerged with one sleeping child. Then, with the trailer on the verge of collapse, he rescued the other."

Mark Carlile shows us the importance of what Jesus shows us to pack. All of the young family's possessions were at risk of burning up. That calls for urgent response. What was important, though, were the lives of the children. Using your God-given abilities for urgent causes is far less important than using them for the really important purpose of saving lives, saving souls.

The next two tests are easily disposed of if you have first packed a trust in God and a willingness to do what is important before what might even be urgent.

The second essential to pack is a refusal to test God, to treat God like a vending machine or to assume that you have how God operates all worked out. The packing mistake is to ask, "Does God really like me? Let's see." Equally wrong is testing other people with phony or trumped up crises. "Let's see if she'll do what I want without me asking?" "Will he notice what is different about me this time?" That sort of packing continues to leave you at the center of your live and pushes God out to the edge. No one can ever meet all of your needs, wants and desires, nor should they try. Further, to pack a bag full of ways to tests somebody's love for you is a sure way to pack so much weight on that person, that they will fall and your relationship will be over.

Jesus shows us what to pack instead. "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" The person you test the most is the person who loves you the most. Try to test the One who loves you enough to give you life and love always and you will break your relationship and spoil the love and life you are offered. Accept that you are loved, respected and appreciated. Move on from there.

Finally, Jesus shows us how much concern we need to pack for possessions. We live in a world full of possessions. These are the kingdoms of the world. Family, work, public approval, self-perception and more are the kingdoms that surround us, kingdoms we must move through. Jesus does not say to ignore these kingdoms. What Jesus shows us is that we pack our allegiance to the kingdom of God. If, instead, we pack a willingness to serve any of those other kingdoms first, before we serve the kingdom of God, then we have no room to include allegiance to God.

Jesus shows us that we pack first the great commandment; Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. If we pack that, then we have packed right. Loving God first moves us away from efforts to get God on our side. Loving God first lets us pack the desire to be where God is and move to that side.

Packing essentials is a serious topic. Too many of us pack for our spiritual journey like the White Knight is Alice in Wonderland. He packed a mouse trap because, well, you never know when you might see one. Jesus, instead, shows us to pack the essentials; trust that God is good, use your resources to improve the space around you, know that God and God's people love and appreciate you, and, finally, seek first to find where God is at work. Go there. Those are packing essential. Lent is a long time to go through. Life is even longer. Take packing tips from the Master. You will journey better.



THE WHITE KNIGHT