****

**Working For The Divine Healer**

**July 8, 2018**

**Mark 6:1-13**

Grace and peace to you from God Our Father and from the Divine Healer who still sends us out to heal and save, Jesus Christ our savior and our Lord, amen.

It’s common sense to anyone today that you can't put guns, knives, crossbows, meat cleavers, box cutters, mace or similar items in your carry-on luggage and expect to be allowed to board an airliner. Since 911 the Transportation Security Administration or TSA has made air travel quite a hassle for just about everyone. I do have to admit though, the last 2 or 3 times we’ve flown we somehow got on the “pre-screened” list and were able to skip the x-rays and the whole strip search process and go right straight to the express lane. Even so, you still can’t take many of the items you’d like to take because they’re simply forbidden. I really don’t understand some of the items we’re told must be left behind. I mean, what's the problem with mascara, toothpaste, mouthwash, hair gel, yogurt, or chocolate pudding your bag? I know a few personal care items are permitted in very small amounts and packed a special way, but not the other stuff in any quantity. Apparently, explosives can be disguised to look like those innocent products, so we have to either leave them at home or put them in our checked bags. I think the TSA would be happier if we all took nothing more than the clothes on our backs for our journeys by plane, but generally, that's not practical.

I would never have made it as one of those early disciples. Take nothing, but the clothes on your back is essentially what Jesus told his disciples. I mean when I go away for a couple of days I pack about 5 sets of clothes and just as many pairs of shoes… "Take nothing for the journey," he told them. Actually, according to Mark, Jesus did allow them to take a staff and wear sandals, and of course, the clothes they were wearing. Jesus, like the TSA, did have a list of prohibited items: no bread, no bag, no money in their belts and no second tunic. Jesus had a reason for the items he banned: They could undermine the mission he was sending his disciples to accomplish. Jesus wanted them to depend on God to provide for them through the hospitality of strangers. How they traveled and how they were welcomed was to be in and of itself, a demonstration of God's care.

So, think about it, Jesus said that they were not to check any bags, and could only take one small carry-on. A lesson for us: When Jesus sends us out to be his people in the world, He still asks us to rely on him and thus take nothing extra with us. The thing is, we can't help but take along who we actually are, including the "baggage" we normally carry. By baggage, I mean something other than suitcases and backpacks. When I say “baggage,” think shorthand for all our burdensome personal history we drag with us that interferes with our living fully in the present.

This baggage could be unproductive ways of dealing with conflict, inappropriate responses triggered by something from our past at the most inopportune moments. Your baggage might include unaddressed fears from childhood, psychological damage from abuse, frightening ideas about God, or PTSD from a previous trauma. Just about any holdover from our past preventing us from getting on well in our relationships or with our daily responsibilities, that’s what constitutes your real baggage. Sometimes our baggage gets so heavy we need counseling or psychological help to unload it. Unloading our personal baggage is hard work. First of all, we work hard to hide it from everyone. We’re really good at putting up a façade and pretending everything is great, even while were being eaten up inside. We may have cloaked ourselves so heavily in counterproductive attire we'd feel naked if we really stripped it off.

All of us have some kind of baggage that travels with us even when we think we've taken nothing for the journey. There are a couple of helpful things we can learn from this account of Jesus sending out the Twelve. First, while he tells them to take nothing for the journey, he never tells them to go buck naked. They are to be vulnerable, but not that vulnerable. They can take their shortcomings, scarred psyches and damaged emotions with them, and they can still do the work Jesus calls them to do. They were still able to cast out demons and heal the sick even despite their numerous inadequacies. Second, and this is really important, they were working for the Divine Healer. Let’s never forget disciples of Jesus never act in their own name, but always in the name of Jesus our Lord and the Divine Healer. It’s through Him and in His power we’re able to live and act and have our being, not of our own human nature.

Our Gospel tells us the disciples cast out many “demons” and anointed many who were sick and cured them. In the Bible, the meaning of demons and illness range from our sins, on the one hand, to our illnesses, on the other. In today’s Gospel the Greek word translated as sick isn’t really referring to an illness per se. The fuller meaning is more like Jesus cured a few people who were feeble or lacking in some way. It's reasonable to conclude that demons and sickness can also include emotional baggage. For that kind of load, the Scripture suggests what's needed is neither forgiveness nor medicine, but divine healing. Lucky for us our boss is The Divine Healer…

We Christians, who know all the vocabulary of organized religion, quite often very quick to label all of our hang-ups as sins. Some can be, but we shouldn’t be too quick to go there. The person who has too high an opinion of himself may be guilty of the sin of pride, but just as likely, the one who flaunts his abilities may not be proud at all. He may have such low self-esteem his apparent pride is actually an attempt to hide how worthless he actually feels. What he suffers from is not sin, but baggage. What he needs is not forgiveness, but healing.

Christians who suffer from persistent guilt may naturally conclude they have some unconfessed sin in their lives. That could be the case, but it's also possible those feelings of guilt may simply arise from the fact their parents were severe and judgmental people, or that they grew up hearing a lot of hellfire-and-damnation preaching from a Pastor thinking you can scare people into heaven.

There are many types of baggage, too many to go through them all in a short sermon. Human hang ups and quirks come in an infinite variety of shapes and sizes. The main thing I want you to know is we all carry our load of bags. Each of us carries our own unique set of luggage. In order to be an effective servant of Jesus Christ we must be able to control, as much as possible, how our baggage effects our personality so we can successfully relate to others, both inside and those outside of the Body of Christ. Simply becoming aware of our personal hang ups and the triggers that set them off helps to limit the negative effects they have on our interpersonal relationships. For example, if I had been raised by an alcoholic abusive parent, working through those issues will benefit me and everyone around me before I allow them to become controlling influences in how I treat others.

What can we do about our baggage? Here’s some things that might be helpful in dealing with our infirmities. They might even help us leave some baggage behind. Once you’ve discovered your specific issue the first thing any Christian might want to consider is praying about it. Asking for God’s help is always a great ***first step*** to recovery. I’ve found when I admit to God my specific problem, my prayer has already helped me face it head on. Armed with that awareness I can attempt to minimize how my reactions interfere with those I love and keep me from being the kind of person I really want to be. Next, try to empty the poison bottle. By that I mean take a look those whom you might blame for certain of hang-ups, and decide what you can do to keep those memories from repeatedly poisoning you day after day.

It sure would be nice to have our own personal TSA agent assigned to force us to get rid of our unhealthy baggage, but God does provide ways for us to identify and minimize the negative impact of all those terrible things that we’ve gone through. Psychological counselling, pastoral counselling, prayer, confession and forgiveness, and Holy Communion are just a few of those means of Grace by which God provide for us exactly what we need to cast out our demons.

Just as we prepare for a vacation trip by taking only the essential things we need as we travel, so we prepare for our journey of faith by looking within ourselves to see what we’re carrying around inside us. What a great gift it is to know our boss is the Divine Healer and provides for everything we need to be whole and complete. May we learn to take advantage of the means of grace God provides for us. Amen.