

**“When All You Have Is All You Need”**  
**Texts: Isaiah 43:1-7, Luke 9:1-6**  
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*He said to them, “Take nothing for your journey...” Luke 9:3a*

Yesterday, a wonderful conference was held at Morningside. Over 150 Presbyterian pastors and laypeople from all over greater Atlanta gathered here in our building to be inspired and given practical ways to revitalize their congregations. Aware of the alarming trends of decline in Presbyterian churches all over the United States, these seekers came to Morningside to hear stories and strategies for church transformation. We welcomed folks from large churches and small churches, suburban, rural, and urban congregations diverse in every imaginable way. What drew them here was a call to this moment. Throughout the gathering there was a palpable energy and a strong sense of urgency—that now is the time for us to reclaim our unique God-given ministry and pursue it with all our imagination and passion. It is no secret why this conference took place at Morningside. I can assure you, it was about much more than our wonderful parking lots and our delicious coffee. This is a congregation that has found its mission in recent years, and I believe that others all over our denomination are determined to do the same. Perhaps we stand on the edge of one of those defining moments of revival in the church. Perhaps.

We can find excellent examples of these defining moments in the scriptures of our faith tradition. How about the disciples in this morning’s gospel reading from Luke? Up until this point in the story, the disciples have been innocent bystanders to the life-changing work of Jesus in the world. They stood at a distance as he performed miracles, healed the sick, preached of new possibilities, proclaimed prophetic truth to power, and unfolded profound parables. That distance has provided safety and comfort for these disciples who have left so much to follow the one they call Lord. But comfort can breed complacency and apathy, as the pastor of any historic established congregation can tell you. Last week, as a part of my Interim Pastor Training at Calvin Center, we were divided into groups, each one charged with creating a fictional congregation. My group has given this scenario: Your historic downtown church has resisted every change for over a hundred years. Even as the area has been revitalized, your members have been content to rest on their 19<sup>th</sup> century laurels and one hundred million dollar endowment. (Remember, I said the church was fictional.) We named our congregation, with apologies to Lake Wobegon, “Our Lady of Perpetual Inertia.” Comfortable complacency has been the undoing of more than a few Presbyterian congregations. Perhaps a defining moment has come to our denomination.

Knowing well the dangers of comfort, Jesus makes a bold move in the ninth chapter of Luke. We are told that he called his disciples together, gave them power and authority,

and sent them out. No longer safe on the sidelines, the disciples were now sent to proclaim and practice the kingdom of God. They were called to live out faith that they had confessed. And it is in the *doing* that the disciples are transformed from bystanders to active participants in God's work in the world.

When did it happen to you? What moment or event or person called you beyond the sidelines of faith? Was it a need in the community that you knew God was leading you to fill? Was it a deep soulful longing for something more than a life lived for self alone? Was it a wake up call from a friend or a loved one? Was it a joy or tragedy that opened the door to faith? Perhaps you are still waiting for that moment of call and clarity to come. That defining moment when you, like the disciples, are pushed out beyond comfort and routine into a life of active faith.

Anyone who has experienced such an epiphany knows that it is a mixed blessing. To hear a call from God to active faith means making changes, and this is where the warm and cuddly spirituality of much contemporary Christianity comes up short. No divine call comes without a command. And the command of Jesus to his disciples might give us a sense of the seriousness of the mission. Jesus sends the disciples out, and as they go he insists that they take nothing for the journey. No staff, bread, bag, or money. This is not just traveling light, the disciples are told to leave even the essentials behind. Jesus seems to know intuitively that our greatest fear, when we leave the safety of distant observation behind, is that we won't have what it takes. And so he leaves the disciples with nothing, other than the grace of God and the goodwill of others.

Most Biblical scholars agree that the instructions of Jesus are intentional, and almost all of them say the intention something like this: "The command to take nothing for the journey forces the twelve to rely completely on God for their ministry." I agree with that. The disciples will undergo a number of trials and difficult tests in the coming months and years, and throughout it will help to know that God provides for them in the midst of the struggle. But I believe, particularly in the gospel of Luke, that something different may be going on. Because, despite the insistence of the prosperity gospel entrepreneurs, God does not rain down tunics and bread and gold coins from heaven, at least not in this call story.

No, to take nothing for the journey also forces the disciples to rely on the other, perhaps most importantly to rely on those whom they will serve. They will not get far on their journey without bread or money and so they will have to depend on the generosity and kindness of other travelers as they go about their new mission.

With all of you, I have spent the week reading reports of the utter devastation in the nation of Haiti. We have all prayed for that nation's people who must now struggle to survive in the aftermath of the earthquake. The people who have been nearest to my heart this week have been the residents of St. Joseph's Home for Boys. St. Joseph's is a sacred place for me, a wonderful orphanage and guesthouse in Port-au-Prince operated by my friend Michael Geilenfeld. I have been a guest in this home on two trips to Haiti, most recently in April of 2008 when Sara and I spent a week there. The first

message I received from friends in Haiti last week was certainly a mixed bag of positives and negatives. It read: "St. Joseph's is destroyed. All of the boys accounted for and only two injuries. Please pray for Haiti and the St. Joseph's family."

The pictures of the destruction were overwhelming and hard to believe. This beautiful building and beacon of Christian hospitality reduced to a pile of rocks. Over the next several days, I received many messages, including some from a friend named Amy whose husband had flown down to take much-needed supplies. A short email from Amy sits on my desk to remind me of the shred of hope woven into the despair: "I just talked to Michael at St. Joseph's. He is upbeat and hopeful, and as he laughed my heart filled with joy. He says people gather in open places and pray and sing all night. We will walk through the fire with God on our side."

"When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you." Michael takes his place in a long line of prophetic voices crying out for courage and hope at a time when both are scarce. Like the prophets of the Old Testament, he stands in the midst of tragedy and proclaims comfort. Relying on the grace of God and the generosity of other human beings, Michael's faith remains strong. And, as I consider the hospitality he and the St. Joseph's family showed to me, I can see why he is defiantly hopeful. God provides, and God provides all of us as ministers to one another.

All we have is all we need because we live in a world of abundance. God has created a magnificent world, with more of every kind of resources than we could ever imagine. The question that is left to us is this: how will we use the abundance that God has entrusted to us?

It is a question for all of us who have more than enough to survive and to share. It is also a question, I believe, for the Morningside congregation in the weeks and months ahead. Can we trust that we have what it takes, enough faith and courage, enough dollars and energy, to pursue with passion God's mission in the world. The church of Jesus Christ, on North Morningside Drive and all around the world, does not exist for its own sake. We are not an alliance for likeminded individuals and we are not a religious glee club. The church was not even our idea. At another defining moment, on the day of Pentecost, the church was born under the authority of our sovereign God.

We are called into existence and commissioned to serve God in ministries of justice and compassion each day. Our worship on Sunday nourishes us **and** reminds us that all we have is all we need to be about God's work in the world. And then that worship pushes is out into that world, where we will encounter all kinds of opportunities for mission and witness. Worship is the place where we hear the message afresh each week: you have been given power and authority; you have been sent out to proclaim and to heal. And what you already have among and within you is more than enough to get started.

When did it happen to you?

For me, it was the summer of 2007. I was visiting with an inmate at Metro State Prison who had just received news that custody of her son was going to be taken away before she was released. It was a difficult visit. As I sat with her, she spoke of her hopelessness and despair in the face of so much heartbreak. I tried to provide what comfort I could, painfully aware of how inadequate my words were. When it was time for me to go, I hesitantly asked if we could pray together, trying to think of something to say. She responded that she would like to pray this time, I breathed a sigh of relief and she began to speak candidly with God. She prayed for herself, that God would give her courage and peace and that God would make a way out of no way for her. She prayed for her son and the rest of her family. But as she continued to pray, I noticed a change in her petitions. She was praying for me and the other chaplains at the prison. She was praying for the guards and counselors and administrators who work there. She was praying for homeless children in Atlanta and AIDS orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa. She was praying for the powerful and for the powerless. Her prayers reached the far corners of the globe and the cell next door. When she had closed her prayer, I asked her how she felt. "I feel at peace. It always helps me to give my troubles to God and to pray for other people. They are just like me. They need God to work in their lives. That's what we all pray for, God's presence and God's power in our lives." And with a smile that displayed faith deeper than fear, she closed with these words: "You know, Chris, when God is all you have...you learn that God has all you need."

And I said, "Amen."