

# *A Spiritual Spring for the Week*

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Sermon Text: Matthew 10:1-15

Sermon Title: "Bags Packed and Ready to Go" (A Journey through Matthew)(Pentecost)

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When we go on vacation, we always have to pack a bag. We get our suitcases from the attic or closet, and we open them on the bed, and start stuffing them with all the things we think we need for the trip. If it is cold, bring a sweater and/or jacket. If it is hot, bring the bathing suit and sunscreen. I finally got an app for my iPad, in which I have created a list of the things I want to take on vacation. I have a list for all my clothes and a list for all my toiletries. All I have to do is throw something into my bag, and check it off the list. The item moves to the bottom of the screen, and all unchecked items move toward the top. I like this app, because I always forget to bring something. I always miss that one thing I think I really need for the trip. We all hate doing that.

Jesus is sending the disciples on a trip in Matthew 10. He has called them as disciples to spread the good news of salvation in God the Father. He has given the disciples power to cast out demons and to heal all sorts of diseases. Now it is time for those disciples to

travel two by two from one village to another and do some good work for God's kingdom. Before they leave, Jesus helps them to pack their bags.

Of course, we could spend some time talking about the actually "suitcases" that Jesus wanted the disciples to pack. We could only talk about how Jesus didn't want the disciples to bring extra clothing or extra money on the trip (leave the American Express card at home), but if we do so we could miss the other instructions on suitcase packing that Jesus offered his followers. When our God and Lord packs a suitcase for us for ministry, he packs it in such an exact and precise way that we will have everything we need for that ministry.

Since it is Pentecost, let's start off by talking about words. On Pentecost we go to Acts 2, and see how many disciples were gathered in an upper room, ready to find out what God was going to do with them next. They were about to go on a trip, whether they knew it or not. God was about to pack their bags, and the item to go into those bags was words. Each person began to speak a different language, because God was going to send them to different parts of the world. "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing comes from the word of God."<sup>1</sup> Those men and women had to be

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 10:17.

able to communicate with other people – foreign people to them – and what better item to have in their suitcases but the words to talk about God.

Moses had a problem with words, when he was sent on a trip back to Pharaoh to speak with him. “I am not eloquent,” he told I AM, the God who is who God is. “I have a heavy tongue and I sound silly.”<sup>2</sup> God assured Moses that he would speak, and speak well enough to get the message across. The disciples in an upper room would speak well after Pentecost, no matter which country they visited, and the message would get across. God gives us the words at the right time to share. God will give us the words and the message will get across.

We might not have the words come to us immediately all the time but they will come, especially if God has a message to share. There are many times I go to the hospital, for example, and I listen to a man or woman talk about their sick loved one. The wires and tubes frighten them. Their loved one’s inability to communicate is shocking. They cannot believe how sick that person is. They wonder why God would allow him or her to become so sick. They have no clue what they will do without that sick loved one being around. The words are honest and blunt, and I sometimes do

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<sup>2</sup> Exodus 4:10.

not have the word to speak, or at least not right off the bat. I cannot interrupt with smart and pithy words that have no feeling in them. I have to listen first. I have to listen while the confused, scared person shares words with me. I offer silent words to God, and pray that he may help me say the right words. And at the right time, I ask a question. I give another perspective. I hope that the message is coming across that God is present, that God loves the person speaking with me and the sick person in bed, and that God will take care of everything. “Who has made the human mouth?” God asks Moses.<sup>3</sup> “Who gives us the ability to speak?” We are disciples of Christ, so the first item we will find in our suitcases are words, which God has confidence in us to use.

As we rifle through our suitcases, we might also find charity. Charity involves kindness, compassion, generosity. “Freely you have received [from me], so freely give,” Jesus says.<sup>4</sup> “A Rabbi was bound by law to give his teaching freely and for nothing; the Rabbi was absolutely forbidden to take money for teaching the Law which Moses had freely received from God.”<sup>5</sup> Moses came down the mountain with two stone

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<sup>3</sup> Exodus 4:11.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 10:8

<sup>5</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew: Volume 1*, 376.

tablets, not two stone tablets and keys to a new Mercedes-Benz and the deed to a 60-acres estate and half a million dollars in 100 dollar bills. A rabbi could charge a family to teach their children, because it was the parents' task to teach their own children, not the Rabbi (that gives me an idea for when Confirmation Class comes around next year). The rabbi could receive money in return for time spent. Otherwise, the word of God goes out freely.

It is not like we charge people for the service we give them. They want to talk about something, we talk. If they need help with something, we help. We don't pull out a register and tabulate how much per hour it is going to cost them. We are charitable, we are generous, with our service.

What we might do, however, is withhold charity. We may claim to be too busy to help out or speak with somebody. That is a popular excuse that anybody could permit us to use. We are all busy doing something – being busy seems to be the right of every person. Deep down, though, it is an excuse, because we are not busy all the time. Add up all the time in a day that we claim we are really busy, and we might come up with an hour or two. The rest of the time is used reading emails, posting Facebook pictures, hanging out next to the water tank, texting our

friends, and watching TV. That isn't busy work. Think of how wide the gaps of time are between those times that we really are doing something that requires our full attention. In those wide gaps we have the chance to be charitable.

We also may be uncharitable, when we don't want to hear it from somebody. Maybe the person has come to us time and time again. Maybe we have heard it all before, and we just want that person to go away. Jesus said, "Freely you have received, freely give." How many times do we bug our God and Lord with our petty problems, and yet God will always listen? How many times do we "not get it" and complain to God, and God never walks away? Maybe people keep coming to us with the same problems, because we are the only ones who can really help. They see something in us, and believe in us to give aid. How many times do our children come to us with the same problems? Over and over again with the same phobias, the same frustrating questions. They believe in us to help. We should try to be generous with our children, with everyone. Listen to their stories, ask questions, and explore the core of their pain. We are never too busy to be nice. We are never too busy to be charitable with God's word.

One other thing we should find in our suitcases, the ones that our Lord packs for us, is a GPS, God's Positioning System. The reason why I have a GPS on my smartphone is because I want to know where I am and where I need to go next. The GPS directs me to the next location without getting lost (I hope). God's Positioning System shows us where we need to go next in order to serve others. Disciples are people of God who go out. We don't sit in one place and expect people to come to us. We go to them.

When we read the Gospels, what do we see? Jesus traveling. He goes to Capernaum, and now he goes to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, and now he visits Samaria, and Bethany, and Jerusalem. Jesus visits people in their homes, in the synagogues, on the streets, and on the road to the next place. On Pentecost Day, when the disciples are receiving different language through tongues of fire, what are they supposed to do next? Go out. Peter stays around Jerusalem. Philip goes to North Africa. Andrew goes to Greece and Turkey. Bartholomew goes to India. James goes to Spain.

Jesus says to his disciples in Matthew 10 to visit towns and find a worthy person's house to stay in. The disciples live with those people in their house. During the night they get to know the people in that

house, and they share the word of God with them. During the day they go out to the town to visit with the townspeople. Ministry is boots-on-the-ground. Ministry is hands-on. If we are going to serve people, we cannot help but be in touch with them. We cannot help but be in contact with them on some level, so together we may relieve burdens, share love, and discover the abundant life that God has for us.

By using the GPS, God's Positioning System, we may travel to places we never thought we would visit. We may do things we have never done before. One simple way to reach out to others could be by tagging them. You see some anonymous person in the store or in line, and you want to do something nice for them. You help them in some way, which causes them to smile and say thank you, and then you may give them one of these (Morrow Church calling card). It says, "TAG!!! You've been chosen for a Good Deed. May God bless your day." It has the name of our church and the address and the time of our worship. I know it is shameless promotion for our church, but even if they do not respond by coming here, at least we may show them respect and compassion.

I got the idea when I was sitting in line at Starbucks (Yes, I was at Starbuck's again). I was waiting in my car for my drink, and when I finally



approached the window to pay for it, the girl said to me that it was taken care of. I had no idea what she meant, until she gave me a card. I said that I was tagged by the person in the car in front of me. She paid for my drink, slipped in the card along with her payment, and simply drove away. Of course, the calling card had the name of the church on it, and I was never going to visit it. But I greatly appreciated her generous service. I think we could do the same thing: tag somebody for a good deed, and let them know which church we come from and who gives us the ability to serve.

By using the GPS, God's Positioning System, we may do more than tag people. We might find ourselves helping in a soup kitchen or a food pantry. We might find ourselves going on a mission trip to someplace in the US or someplace abroad. We might serve little children, and help them with their homework so they may improve their grades. We might serve adults, and help them cope with getting older and becoming frailer.

Facebook and Twitter are things we look at in the comfort of our homes or offices. We read all sorts of tweets and posts every day. God's Positioning System might direct us to a certain tweet or post of a certain friend. If we read it carefully, we might discover that the person isn't just venting about something. It is a

cry for help. The friend might not say, “Hey, I need help,” but read between the lines, and the message is clear that it is a cry for help. Our GPS will cause us to respond, not just with our own post but with a phone call, with a visit, with an invitation to go out to have coffee together. Just as disciples went out from town to town, house to house, so we are called to be available to others, to be in touch with them.

Pentecost is all about traveling. It is all about going near or far to help others in need, whether the need is physical, mental, or spiritual in nature. If we call ourselves Christians – followers of Christ – then we always have traveling to do. God has our bags already packed and ready. All we need to do is take those bags with us and use all the resources within them to tell others of God’s love.