

I recently heard an interview with the artist of the song Jason just sang. His name is Mon Rovia. The song serves as a reminder to look up and recognize one's capacity for healing, even when enduring deep emotional, or in the case of his childhood in Liberia, physical trauma. For a long time, Mon Rovia was in love with suffering; it was heavy baggage for his traveling, and he blamed the road of his life for his journey. Mon Rovia says that one starts to feel useless because you can become what the trauma you've experienced tells you you are. Yet, he notes that we each have autonomy on life's journey. We can choose to go a different way- a way that brings freedom, new life and healing. He says, "I was in love with my suffering; it became who I knew myself as. Because of this, I couldn't see the hands that had been extended to lift me out and bring me healing." He goes on to talk about the Japanese term "kintsugi" where they take this Japanese pottery that's cracked and broken and piece it back together with a metallic lacquer, making it beautiful and useful again. This idea of kintsugi is what God does with each of our broken lives, especially with our pain and suffering. Mon Rovia shares that each piece of his life that was troubled soon began to be glued back together into a beautiful mosaic that was filled with healing, purpose, and peace. Friends, you cannot make this stuff up. I had already chosen this song for today when I met with Matt Hunter in my office this week who is entering the ministry process. I am his liaison to a committee for his preparation to ministry. I had no clue Matt was an artist. He commented on how much he loved the art around Triune and he then humbly said that he brought a piece of his art with him- though in his car- to give to Triune, if I thought it was a fit. He went on to share

that he felt God leading him to gift this piece that he had meticulously labored- a sign and symbol of his faith- over to Triune. After our visit we went out to his car, and I was reminded- once again- that I never know what to expect around here. As my colleague, Pat, likes to say, "The Holy Spirit lives here." He pulled this heavy, wooden box very gingerly out of the car, and what I saw absolutely took my breath away. It reminded me of "kintsugi." As he began to describe the broken pieces and the way God restores and redeems us and then calls us to go out into the world and to mirror Christ- to reflect Christ's love in his life, death and resurrection. I stood in the parking lot, holding this beautifully broken and glued back together, redemptive piece of art, and chuckled to myself with tears welling up in my eyes, thinking, "God, why am I still surprised by the way you show up in this world?" For this third week of Lent, today's text "is a reminder of what discipleship calls us to. And right after naming our mission, it gives us words of caution- words of caution about everything that can distract us from exactly the thing God has empowered us to do" (*Meeting Jesus on the Road*, Cynthia Campbell and Christine Coy Fohr). Today's text leaves room, if we choose to accept God's mission, to be surprised over and over again, by how we meet Jesus on the road. Again these words of caution or instructions Jesus gives are specific though varied in the different versions we read in Matthew and Mark's Gospels as well as in Luke's. Today we'll mostly stick with Luke's version of the story. But before listening to God's word for us this day in the Gospel of Luke, let us first pray. **PRAY. READ.**

Jesus begins today's story with incredibly powerful words. He has given the twelve disciples- the twelve whose confusion and brokenness we read about in the gospels- Jesus gives them power and authority, commissioning them to go out and proclaim the good news of God's kingdom and to heal. This is not only Jesus' mission but also now the disciples' mission. You see, being sent out is the natural result of following Jesus. Before going Jesus cautions them first with specific instructions for the road. What if you read the following description for a journey you were signing up for? "Pack nothing. Bring only your determination to serve and your willingness to be free" (Alla Renee Bozarth, "Passover Remembered"). No checked luggage? Just a carry on bag?! No, it says absolutely no bag. Determination to serve? Check. Willingness to be free?! I think?! Don't know exactly what that looks like but ok. Like Mon Rovia some of us want to hang on to our suffering or other things. But for a day or so...sure! Sign me up! I'm open to a little adventure, I think. How about you? For a longer time? Well, you see I'd need some things like my phone and this and that and this and that. But Jesus is not the author of confusion. He knew what he was asking of his disciples. You see taking nothing with you requires reliance on local hospitality. Talk about making some of us uncomfortable? Some of you gathered here this morning know what that is like while others of us don't. Mostly though taking nothing means that they have to fully rely on God and on the kindness of strangers. No walking stick. Unarmed and vulnerable. No bag. No way to carry supplies. No bread. Not even a granola bar or a cup to hold water. No money. Nada. Nothing. No extra shirt to change into when they get dirty or sweaty. No this and that-

nothing extra but themselves and their faith. There is no guarantee of success nor safety. The disciples have to trust in God's care and in the power of the gospel. When Jesus sent his disciples out, he sent them out as vulnerable outsiders. They had no political or economic status or power at all save the power of the Holy Spirit moving through them to heal and serve. "His instruction was reminiscent of the Israelites in the desert, who were instructed to trust that manna would appear each morning and quail in the evening. But instead of manna, what these disciples are called to rely on is hospitality from the very people they are going to serve" (Campbell and Fohr). "Clearly Jesus thought there was great value in ministering from the margins. He wanted Christian witness to flow from humility and vulnerability- not from complacency and comfort. He wanted the message of God's saving love to come from dependent outsiders. From the edges of society, not the center. I hear a lot of lament these days, about the declining influence and authority of the Church in Western culture. Certainly, there are legitimate reasons to worry and to grieve. But what if decentering is a *good* thing for Christianity? What if we need to learn the art of receiving welcome before we can extend it honestly in Christ's name? What if the people we sideline as recipients of our charity are actually meant to be teachers" (Debie Thomas, journeywithjesus.net)? Let that sink in for a minute. Last week after lunch I walked over to a gentleman and asked him if he'd like a bagged meal to take for the road. I thought for sure he'd take one, but he politely declined. I asked, "Are you sure?" And he went on to explain how he carefully decides what to take with him because each little thing adds to the weight of his backpack and as more seasoned

man, his back and legs can only handle so much weight before they begin to hurt. Over and over again, I am humbled by the things I do not know about carrying what I own on my back. And for some of you who have your things stolen- everything you own- you know very well what it's like to take nothing with you.

Perhaps it is time to revive the practice of evangelical hospitality?! Furthermore, the disciples are to minister wherever they are, as long as they are well received. Should they be rejected, they are released from obligation and given permission to move on from that house or place. They are compelled to announce good news, not to enforce its acceptance (*Discipleship Study Bible*). *Shake the dust off your feet* is a phrase that has been argued over by scholars for years. Some say it represents uncleanness or shame-laden such as, "We're taking none of your stuff, not even your dirt with us," or it could mean rejection worthy of judgment like, "Come Judgment Day, this is all that will be left of you." However, they nor we are God so none of us get to do the judging only the Taylor Swift- "shake it off" part. My choice of interpretation- because I worry about followers of Christ speaking for Jesus or thinking that they have unfettered power. That's not how this commissioning thing works. God is the source of any power that God chooses to give to us. Therefore, I choose to go with shaking the dust off your feet as another way of saying that disciples have taken nothing- and that includes emotional space or baggage- from those who reject them and thus reject Jesus. We move on- taking no baggage and that includes leaving the judgment department to God and to God alone. It's about not allowing

anything to get in the way of continuing to fulfill God's mission in this world. "As people seeking to follow Jesus, we are also called to serve in a similar way. Like the original twelve, we are called not just as a promotional campaign for the name of Jesus but as people who have been equipped and commissioned to serve in this world, even in our brokenness. And like those disciples, we have been called to go at it unattached: unattached to our own agendas; unattached to our to-do lists and expected outcomes; unattached to all the plans we make that get in the way of us actually listening to God's people, who are present in our midst. Jesus is teaching his disciples; this is what proclaiming God's kingdom looks like. And to get there you've got to let your stuff go. Jesus is inviting his disciples to acknowledge all that they carry with them- both literally and figuratively- and, as an act of devotion, set them aside. Because once they do, that is when the miracles happen" (Campbell and Fohr).

Much like my new friend, Matt's, art here, when we call ourselves "Christians," "we mirror Jesus, whether we plan to or not. What Jesus handed to his disciples when he commissioned them for ministry was not just the gift of the Holy Spirit but Jesus' own reputation, his own character, his own standing in the world. What a risk he took and what a responsibility we bear" (Thomas)! So what's the takeaway for us? I believe it's a call to "consider what it might look like to travel unattached, if only for an hour. Consider how you can set aside your own agenda and open yourself to what might come your way: the conversations that might be possible, the relationships that might be

present, the learning right there for the taking. What do you need to set aside in order to fulfill God's mission? Your phone? Another addiction? That toxic relationship? What other baggage needs to be left behind? Maybe we need to let go of being consumed by our calendar or our desire to be perfect or the belief that there is only one right way to do things" (Campbell and Fohr)? I know that, for me, so much of what I hold onto is exactly what keeps me from God's mission. What baggage do we need to leave behind in order for us to practice radical, risky discipleship and fulfill God's mission? "As God's messengers in the world, we are not at liberty to soften the Gospel for the sake of our own likeability. Jesus has not commissioned us to say whatever is trendy or comfortable or easy or popular. No! Jesus has commissioned us to say what is true. False hope is NOT God's hope. Easy peace is NOT God's peace. And convenient justice is NOT God's justice. Not everyone will open the door, receive Christ's message, and offer us the bread we hope for. Just shake the dust off of our feet. Rejection doesn't excuse our inaction. Jesus gives us the freedom to move on. We're only responsible for our own obedience to God, not for the results of that obedience. As Christ's disciples, the message and mission is still the same, and it is clear. 'Go!' 'Proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.' 'Bring healing'" (Thomas). Thanks be to God! Amen.