

## ***Trying to Keep it Simple***

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

July 7, 2019

Scripture: Luke 10:11, 16--20

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

This is a challenging text for, well, probably all of us. All of us who, simple as we may try to be, so easily acquire things as we go about our day.

At a workshop on Missional Ministry led by theologian Alan J. Roxburgh<sup>1</sup>, we examined a few key biblical passages including the call of Jesus to take little with you. We listened to it using some of the *Lectio Divina*<sup>2</sup> tradition; that is, we listened to today's passage several times. Several different voices read it out loud, then quiet reflection, followed by the invitation for any and all observations:

*What part of this passage do you have questions or observations about?*

One person at the Roxburgh workshop shared that this verse in Jesus' directive was particularly provocative:

Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals;  
**and greet no one on the road.**<sup>3</sup>

I learned something of interest to me in this moment of curiosity. First of all, it should be said that it is a truth of ancient & modern times that, in greeting someone along a quiet road, there is a good chance that you will make small talk with passers by. Roxburgh responded to that curious observation of the workshop participant by pointing out that in ancient Judaism, when you encounter a stranger on the road and chat, it is customary to invite them to your home. The overall tone of this passage in Luke is urgent – God's radical kin-dom is so near, you can feel it. You are on a mission, so **don't be distracted from the vision of God's kin-dom**. When my family are on a mission in our hometown of Capreol they don't take me, because I inevitably bump into people. It is more than pleasantries, it can be 15-minute sessions, and I can feel the eyes of my dear partner and kids rolling.

Travelling light, that is, seeking to live simply, free of encumbrances like material goods we may cling to is an essential teaching of several world religions. It is central to Christianity as well. Christian activist Shane Claiborne is world renowned for his focus on ending the practice of capital punishment in the United States. He has also co-founded a Christian movement appropriately named *The Simple Way*.<sup>4</sup> There, in the midst of inner city, poverty ridden Philadelphia, they invite people to live communally, sharing their resources, growing community gardens, and tackling food security issues. Shane's signature is fashion sense, a homemade monk's robe, bandana and dreadlocks, that he wears everywhere, from large conferences where his is the keynote to teaching academic courses Duke, Harvard and Princeton.

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<sup>1</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh is a priest, seminary professor, and a consultant in missional formation and church leadership

<sup>2</sup> For one way of understanding Lectio Divina, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/253799/1-What-is-Lectio-Divina.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Luke 10, verse 4

<sup>4</sup> For more information on The Simple Way, <https://www.thesimpleway.org>

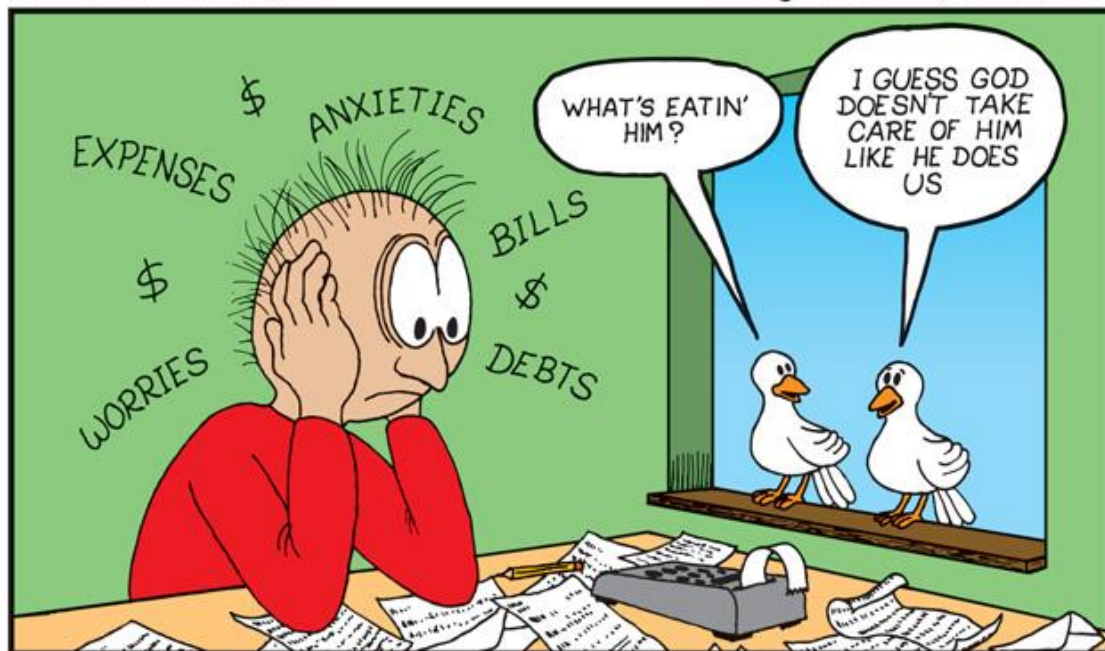
His sense of mission in his life is to bring Good News; but that news of God's kingdom ruffles feathers. The effect of his message wherever he goes can be summed up as, *Comforting the disturbed, and disturbing the comfortable.*<sup>5</sup>

So this cartoon, in case you can't read the dialogue bubbles, has a person stressing over financial woes and one bird on the window sill says to the other, "What's eatin' him?"

The other bird replies, "I guess God doesn't take care of him the way God does us."

## DON'T WORRY

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?  
- MATTHEW 6:26-27 NIV

This cartoon refers to another teaching of Jesus, according to the storyteller Matthew<sup>6</sup> – a variation on a prevailing theme that Jesus is consistent about: that to follow him we must utterly trust God will provide, keep our living simple.

"Do the birds worry, or the lilies of the field?" To paraphrase what Jesus says in Matthew, God takes care of them, and God will surely take care of you and me. Recall the Hebrew Scripture story of God taking care of the Israelites, having left Egyptian slavery only to find themselves in the desert wilderness. In their moment of greatest hunger God sent them fluffy manna, but with the proviso that they eat all that they need

<sup>5</sup> Shane Claiborne. *The Irresistible Revolution*, © 2006 by The Simple Way.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 6:26-27.

but not to stockpile it. Of course, we could predict that the people stockpiled it, and it went bad. Variations on this theme, trying to keep it simple.

So here we are, living in a real world. Most of us will not achieve the simplicity of living of bigger-than-life spiritual icons: Claiborne, Gandhi, Jesus of Nazareth. I don't know about you, but in my household we are working very hard this summer trying to turf our material goods, to put it bluntly, clutter, from our home this summer...it feels like an uphill battle. There are myriad things that we collect on our journey that weigh us down spiritually:

- Things, for example, that we might call "toys" that, if we were asked to let them go, we would be hard pressed to;
- Our fixation on money that make us miserly and miserable;
- How about the culture of fear that has taken over social media, that threatens to push us, everyone, into our individualistic worlds.

To be honest, travelling light might seem impossible. The last thing that I'm going to do is to offer an easy solution to this very real-to-life, complex, dilemma. But where, then, is Good News for us ordinary people who do not see life in a commune anywhere in our future?

Profound hope for us, I believe, in this often adversarial, individualistic, consumeristic world, comes in some of the practical tips offered us today.

For example, those words of Jesus, "Go in pairs." Remember that memorable line from Robert Fulghum's *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten?*

*When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic,  
hold hands and stick together. Be aware of wonder.<sup>7</sup>*

Jesus also invites us, well, maybe a bit more assertively, he *calls* us to be willing to go to where people live, to accept their hospitality, to engage people, and share Jesus' brand of radical peace. You know, that kind of peace that loves unconditionally? The kind that is always willing to speak truth in love, even when truth is not particularly welcome? Have you experienced something like that, where you have had the courage to speak truth to someone, but after you said what needed saying, you felt that that was the end of the conversation, perhaps even the end of the relationship?

Good News is that you didn't candy coat important truth. Ushered out that door of a former friend or sister peeved at you, brush the dust off and bring that tenacious message of peace into every encounter you find yourself in. That's it. You and I practice bringing peace to people. Life is more complicated than that.

The Message of Jesus, though, is simple: Focus on becoming the radical peace that Jesus teaches, and by doing that, you might become a glimpse of God's kin-dom for everyone you meet. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. Copyright © 2003 by Robert Fulghum. Ballantine Books