

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's sermon  
7/04/10 Travel Light Luke 9: 1-6

When Jesus sent his 12 disciples out on a missionary journey, he gave them a strange admonition: Travel light.

Take no staff, take no bag, take no money, and take no bread. What a strange admonition!

In Jesus' days, the staff was used as a weapon to fight robbers and chase away thieves. There is no violence in the coming Kingdom of God.

Bags were signs of riches. Most people did not have enough possessions to need a bag.

Money symbolized the economic power that belonged to only 1% of the population.

A loaf of bread, too, was something only the rich and comfortable were able to enjoy. Common folk ate figs, dried fish, and just a few pieces of unleavened bread.

So the staff, the bag, money, and bread symbolized the power and splendor that this world cherishes.

Now Jesus' admonition no longer sounds so strange. What he meant to say was this: "Do not try to impress people with worldly power and possessions.

Jesus' list of don'ts has one more important commandment. "If you are not welcomed, do not make a scene." That meant, "Encourage and persuade people to accept the good news, but do not force it upon them."

Come to think of it, you cannot force love. Love can only persuade and encourage.

Now what about Jesus' list of dos? It was very simple. Heal the sick in his name and proclaim the good news of the coming kingdom of God.

The disciples' mission was clear: they were to tear down the walls of hostility that divide and separate people. They were to liberate men and women from the pit of egocentrism and self-pursuit with the ennobling power of love.

With this admonition of Jesus as their vision and purpose, four fishermen, one tax collector, and seven other ordinary men began a missionary journey.

Now what does all this mean to us? One thing is clear. What we as a church must proclaim is the same today as then: to be instruments of God's peace, healing, and love.

We are to love one another as Christ loves us. We are to make our congregational life a foretaste of the kingdom of God.

Have no worldly power? It does not matter. Have no worldly authority? It makes no difference. Our church is very small. So what? We are to follow the footsteps of the 12 disciples, knowing that God will show us the way. His Spirit will gently push our backs. In good times and bad, he will lead us.

This is our hope. This is the source of our courage and joy. This is the faith that makes our human life truly human.

Thanks be to God.