

## **Staff and Sandals**

*July 5, 2009*

(Pentecost 5 - Year B)

Mark 6: 1-13

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

During this last week, I drafted a letter.

The letter that I drafted was addressed to the parents of campers at the Camp Allen camp session that Susan and I will be leading in a few weeks.

In this letter, I told the campers what to bring to camp.

The first part of the letter was standard, using the exact wording that I was given by Camp Allen.

For example, I had to tell the parents that cell phones are not allowed at camp.

And I had to tell the parents to pack for their kids:

Plenty of socks, a flashlight and a tasteful bathing suit.

Then, after getting the standard stuff out of the way in my letter, I then instructed about the things that the campers would need for our specific camp session.

I instructed them to pack a white pillowcase for a special craft session that we always have.

I instructed them to pack a can of shaving cream.

Little do the campers know when they arrive at camp, but the shaving cream is used for a shaving cream war on the final day of camp.

In my letter, I detailed several extra items that are needed for the camp session that Susan and I lead.

Jesus also gives instructions to his followers on things that they will need to pack for their mission.

In the Gospel of Mark, Mark writes this:

“[Jesus] called the twelve [disciples] and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.

He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff;

No bread, no bag, no money in their belts;

But to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics.”

In the Gospel, Mark writes to his own specific community and gives them a detailed packing list.

While Jesus does not tell his followers to leave their cell phones at home,

Jesus does tell his followers *not* to bring any bread or any bags or any money in their belts.

While Jesus does not tell the followers to pack a can of shaving cream, Jesus does tell them that they *are* to bring:

1. A staff
2. Sandals.

Therefore, Jesus’ specific instructions, according to Mark, are that the followers of Jesus are only to bring a staff and their sandals.

Jesus’ instructions to his followers also occur in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

However, in Luke, Jesus tells them:

“Take *nothing* for your journey, no staff, no bag, nor bread, nor money - not even an extra tunic.”<sup>1</sup>

And in Matthew, Jesus tells the disciples:

“Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts. No bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff.”<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, only in Mark’s Gospel does Jesus give instructions for them to bring things with them when they go out to cast out demons and unclean spirits.

Only in Mark’s Gospel does Jesus tell his followers to bring a staff and their sandals.

I wonder:

Why is Mark the only Gospel writer who instructs the disciples to take a staff and their sandals?

In the opinion of some scholars<sup>3</sup>, the writer of Mark’s Gospel believes

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 9:3

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 10: 9-10

<sup>3</sup> From Joel Marcus, Anchor Bible Commentary

that it is important for his specific community to be instructed to take a staff and sandals with them when going and casting out unclean spirits,

Because Moses had a staff and sandals with him when he delivered the Israelites.

Jesus gives detailed instructions to us - that we are to be the new Moses, using a staff and our sandals to lead people to a new place of healing and wholeness.

Moses used his staff as a tool to bring healing.

Moses used his staff to part the Red Sea so that the children of Israel could pass from bondage to freedom.

Moses used his staff to strike a rock, so that water would flow out of the rock, quenching the thirst of the children of Israel.

And with his sandals on, Moses led the people of Israel to a new place.

When Moses was first called by God to deliver the Hebrew people,

Moses was told to take his sandals off, because he was standing on holy ground.

Then God tells Moses to put his sandals back on - and to do some walking, leading his people through the wilderness to the new Promised Land.

Moses used his staff and his sandals to lead others to a new place, a place where demons were cast out and all were made whole.

Now when we think of demons or unclean spirits, sometimes we think of people who are possessed, much like Linda Blair was in the movie, *The Exorcist*.

However, I believe that we are possessed by unclean spirits and by demons in much less dramatic ways.

One of the unclean spirits I have been possessed by in this last week is the demonic spirit of the "poor me syndrome."

During this last week, it seemed as if a number of situations had me complaining and saying:

"Poor Me."

And my demonic possession by the “Poor Me Syndrome” reached its height on Thursday afternoon.

On Thursday, I received a phone call from the Woodway Fire Department that there was a fire at our house.

The pump on our swimming pool had overheated, catching the dry leaves around it on fire, causing our pool equipment and our side fence to burst into flames.

We were not home at the time, but our neighbor across the street saw the fire erupt, and acted quickly to get her husband, who is with the fire department, over to our house to extinguish the fire.

After I got home,

After I saw the charred pool pump and the damage,

After I got an estimate on how much money it would cost to repair,

And after I found out that the cost was below our insurance deductible,

I found myself complaining:

“Poor me, it is going to be so expensive to repair the damage from this fire.”

Yet those of us who are a mission for Jesus have been instructed to carry a staff in our hand and to wear sandals on our feet to cast out the unclean spirits of the “poor me syndrome.”

So I used the staff in my hand to cast out these “poor me” thoughts from my head.

I used the sandals on my feet to take me to a new place, a place where I was not having a pity party for myself, but to a promised land of wholeness where I could be grateful, rather than pitiful.

With the staff of Moses in my hand, I now gave thanks for our neighbors who had acted so quickly.

With the sandals of Moses on my feet, I walked into a new land of gratitude - as I gave thanks that my whole house did not go up in flames and as I gave thanks that everyone in my family was safe.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus instructs us to pack a staff and our sandals for our mission.

Jesus instructs us to be a new Moses, leading people out of the bondage of "poor old me" and into the promised land of gratitude.

Jesus instructs us that we *do* have authority over unclean spirits -

All we need is a staff and a pair of sandals.

AMEN.

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