

As some of you may know, I'm a big-time scout.  
 I am a lifetime member of the Girl Scouts and Gold Award winner,  
 and I was also a Venture Scout in the Boy Scouts of America.  
 And one of the major life lessons I took from my scouting career  
 —and there are many—  
 was expert packing.

“Be Prepared” is the Scouting motto,  
 and I prided myself on always having the stuff I needed.  
 Weather-appropriate clothes? Check.  
 Rain gear? Check.  
 Flashlight? Of course, with extra batteries for me *and* my tent-mate.  
 Even in small packs, I found nooks and crannies for all my gear.

At the beginning of our Gospel this morning,  
 Jesus is getting his group of disciples  
 ready for a trip with trustworthy guidance  
 not unlike a Girl or Boy Scout leader.  
 As I read this passage, my inner-Scout responds to all he does.  
 Appointing seventy people and sending them in pairs.

That's the buddy system, of course.  
 Sending laborers into the harvest.  
 With a Scout's enthusiasm for adventure and service, I'll certainly  
 volunteer!  
 Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals.  
*Now, wait a minute, Jesus.*

What about my gear?  
 What if my buddy needs my waterproof headlamp on dark nights?  
 And surely we will need energy from all these granola bars!

I want to tell Jesus  
 how I want to be able to share with others.  
 That I'm the Scout who always has enough.  
 I want to be able to be prepared  
 to provide,  
 to help,  
 to give.

Except that “Being Prepared”  
 is not what *this* journey is about.  
 This journey is about  
 vulnerable dependence.  
 Opening yourself up to others.  
 Receiving rather than giving.  
 Jesus invites his disciples  
 not to pack,  
 but to practice vulnerable dependence.

At the start of the very first missionary journey  
 that Jesus will send people on,  
 he tells these first 70 disciples  
 not how to play the host  
 but how to be the guest.  
 Whatever house you enter, greet it in peace,  
 and if the household members share that peace,  
 stay there,  
 eating and drinking whatever *they* provide,  
 consuming whatever *other people* set before you.  
 And in this,  
 the Kingdom of God has come near.

It’s an invitation to depend on others.  
 To eat instead of feed.  
 To drink instead of pour.  
 It’s an invitation to be vulnerable,  
 completely dependent upon another person and their provisions,  
 not unlike the image of a nursing baby from Isaiah:  
 able only to receive rather than to give.

That, Jesus says, is the Kingdom of God come near.

Jesus invites his followers to a lifestyle and mindset of vulnerable dependence  
 as a way to show us our need for others.  
 No one is an island.  
 No matter how tough or smart or independent or industrious or “prepared”  
 we may think we are,

we all lack something. We need others.  
It's usually what we lack that draws us into community.

And the need for others that comes from accepting this vulnerable  
dependence  
in turn shows us our need for God,  
the Parent who first knit us into being and nurses us to grow.  
But not only the Mother.  
God also is the Gardener on whose produce our lives depend,  
because God is responsible for the growth and fruits  
and that disciples are sent to harvest.  
We harvesters are merely picking the fruits from God's field.

And those fruits, that produce—they are grace.  
Jesus' invitation to vulnerable dependence shows us our need for  
and the presence of God's grace.  
For when we are the eaters but not the cooks  
and the harvesters but not the gardeners,  
we open ourselves up to receive that which we can never prepare,  
the fruits we can never grow ourselves:  
The unconditional love of God.  
Forgiveness, and the gift to start anew each day.  
A place, a home, a glimpse of the Kingdom of heaven on earth.

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The summer of 2011 I walked over 100 kilometers  
on the Camino de Santiago,  
an ancient Christian pilgrimage route that runs through the north of Spain.  
Hundreds of people walk it each year, all traveling together  
and staying in communal hostels  
and eating in large dinner halls.  
So, you eventually get to meet and recognize other travelers along the trail.  
And like I had for all those Scouting trips,  
I packed well. I had only what I needed in my small backpack,  
but I was also prepared.

*So I thought.*

A few days before we were due to arrive in Santiago de Compostela,  
 the end of the route,  
 my Achilles tendon started hurting.  
 It flared up. Swollen and puffy.  
 I could walk, but it hurt,  
 and it helped to walk with a stick.  
 So, along the trail I would pick up various but insufficient walking sticks,  
 some too tall, some too skinny, all rather odd,  
 and eventually I was walking along with a mis-matched stick in each hand.

A fellow Camino-traveler from South Korea,  
 a woman whom I had met a few nights before,  
 swiftly hiked by me with adjustable trekking poles—  
 sort of like ski poles but intended for hiking stability, one in each hand—  
 and I called out to her, “I wish I had packed a pair of those!”

Ahead of me, she stopped.  
 She turned back, waiting for me to catch up.  
 “Here,” she said. “Take these. I don’t need them today.  
 You can give them back to me at the hostel tonight.”  
 And she handed me both trekking poles.

The thing I needed most at that point on my pilgrimage  
 didn’t come from my backpack.  
 It came from someone else.  
 The most important item on my trek  
 was not one I’d packed  
 but was one that was given to me, for free.  
 The presence of God and the fruits of grace were out there to harvest,  
 sown in the hands of a South Korean woman  
 and her trekking poles.

Carry no purse, Jesus invites us.  
 No bag. No sandals.  
 Take whatever is set before you.  
 Not prepared or packed *by you*. But given *for you*.

On our journeys, Jesus invites us to vulnerable dependence

that simultaneously makes us more human  
by drawing us closer to one another  
and moves us closer to The Divine  
by rooting us more deeply in the Kingdom of God.

That is why we rejoice.  
NOT because the spirits submit to us.  
Not because we come prepared and well packed like a Scout.  
Not even because we are generous and can give.

No, we rejoice because, through no doing of our own,  
our names are written in heaven.  
We are part of something greater.  
The vulnerable dependence and the divine grace  
of the Kingdom of God.

AMEN.