

It will come as no surprise to anyone today that you can't put guns, knives, crossbows, box cutters, mace, or similar items in your carry-on luggage and expect to be allowed to board an airplane. But what's the problem with mascara, toothpaste, mouthwash, hair gel, yogurt, pudding, or other similar items in your bag? A few personal care items are permitted in very small amounts if packed a special way, but not the other stuff in any quantity. The reason being that explosives can be disguised to look like those innocent products, so we have to either leave them at home or put them in our checked bags.

Actually, the TSA (Transportation Security Administration) would be happier if we all took nothing more than the clothes on our backs for our journeys by plane, but generally, that's not practical. Still, that's essentially what Jesus told his disciples when he sent them out in pairs to cast out demons, heal the sick and call people to repentance. "Take nothing for the journey," he told them.

Actually, according to St. Mark, Jesus did allow them to take a staff and wear sandals, and of course, the clothes they were wearing. But Jesus, like TSA, had a list of *prohibited* items: no bread, no bag, no money in their belts, and no second tunic. (In other variants of this story appearing in Matthew and Luke, Jesus doesn't even allow the staff and sandals.) And he had a reason for the items he banned: They could undermine the mission on which he was sending his disciples. After all, they were to depend on God to provide for them through the hospitality of strangers. How they traveled, and how they were welcomed, was to be itself a demonstration of God's care.

So, think about it, Jesus said that they were not to check any bags, and could only take one small carry-on. What a group they must have been! Peter's garments may have been too big for John. Phillip's clothes no doubt smelled differently than Andrew's. The attire of Matthew, the former tax collector, may have been more costly than James', the fisherman. Bartholomew's tunic may have had a rip that

made it identifiable as his own. And maybe Thomas' wife was such a good seamstress that the clothing she made for him was easily distinguishable from what the other 11 disciples wore.

And the lesson here for us...When Jesus sends us out to be his people in the world, and tells us to rely on him, and thus take nothing with us, we can't help but take along who we actually are, including the "baggage" we normally carry. And by baggage, I mean something other than a suitcases or bag we take with us on a trip. Of course, I'm talking about all of the burdensome personal history we drag with us that interferes with our living fully for God in the present.

This baggage could be: our nonproductive ways of dealing with conflict, our inappropriate responses that are often triggered at inopportune moments, unaddressed fears from our childhood, psychological damage from abuse, frighteningly false ideas about God -- or just about any holdover from our past that prevents us from getting on well in our relationships, or with our daily responsibilities. In fact, sometimes, such baggage gets so heavy that we need counseling or psychological help to unload it. And that's hard, because we may have cloaked ourselves so heavily in our counterproductive attire that we'd feel naked if we really stripped it off.

Probably most of us have some kind of baggage that travels with us even when we think we've taken nothing for the journey. But there are a couple of helpful things we can take note of in today's story of Jesus sending out the Twelve on their mission.

First of all, while he tells them to take nothing for the journey, he never tells them to go buck naked. They are to be vulnerable, but not *that* vulnerable. They can still take their shortcomings, scarred psyches, and damaged emotions with them, and they can still do the work that he calls them to do. After all, even despite

those traits the disciples of Christ were still able to cast out demons and heal the sick.

Second of all, they were working for the Divine Healer. Matthew says, after reporting a day when Jesus cast out spirits and healed the sick, that what Jesus had done "was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, He took our infirmities and bore our diseases." Note the word "infirmities." Since it's included in an account of Jesus healing several people, we might assume that his use of the term "infirmities" is simply a synonym for an "illness" or a "disease," but in fact, in the Bible, the meaning of the word "infirmity" or "weakness" seems to range anywhere from our sins to our illnesses. It's reasonable to conclude, then, that infirmities can include emotional baggage. And for that kind of burden or difficulty, Scripture suggests that what is needed is neither forgiveness nor medicine, but actual divine healing.

We Christians, who know the vocabulary of righteousness, may be tempted to label some of our hang-ups as sin. Of course, some of our hang-ups can be, but we shouldn't be so quick to go there. The person who has too high an opinion of himself or herself, for example, may be guilty of the sin of pride, but the one who flaunts his or her abilities may not be proud at all. That individual may have such low self-esteem that their apparent pride is actually an attempt to hide how worthless they feel. What he or she suffers from, then, is not sin, but baggage. And what that person needs is not forgiveness, but healing.

Christians who suffer from persistent guilt may naturally conclude that they have some unconfessed sin in their lives. And perhaps that could be the case, but it is also possible that those feelings of guilt may simply arise from the fact that their parents were severe and judgmental people, or that they grew up hearing a lot of preaching that featured hellfire-and-damnation.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his listeners not to be anxious about their lives, what they would eat, drink or wear. He went on to point out that, instead of worrying, we should trust God to care for us, and to seek first God's kingdom. Since *Jesus* said those things, some Christians have concluded that worry and anxiety must therefore be sinful. But that's not what Jesus said. He actually said, "Don't be anxious," but he never said that the person is lost. The tendency to worry about everything doesn't mean we're not faithful followers of Christ. It may mean, however, that we have baggage. That we need healing of some sort.

Here are some things that might be helpful in dealing with our infirmities. They might even help us leave some of our baggage behind: For instance, we can try asking God to help us face our problems squarely and without rationalization. To admit to him the specific reactions that interfere with our relationships, that keep us from doing well. – We can even try asking God to help us accept the responsibility for who we are today, and tomorrow, and the next day after that.

In terms of understanding where our various complexes originate, it may be helpful, to briefly look at certain circumstances in our past that may have contributed to the shaping of our present personalities. But it's far more important to say, "Regardless of how I got where I am, I am responsible for dealing with it now, and for working to become the whole person God intends for me to be." Perhaps we can eventually learn to lay our problems, or our troubles, before God as we learn to let God and let God.

Preacher and author David Seamand tells a story about a woman named Betty. Betty's mother and father were not married when she was conceived. In fact, her parents only married because of the pregnancy, and neither parent really wanted a child.

When Betty was three and a half, her father walked out. Even though she was young, she remembered the final argument between her parents and the

moment when her father left for good. For her, it was a terrifying moment, and it left an aching, malignant core of pain within her. In adulthood, Betty became a Christian and married a Christian man. But they experienced difficulties in their relationship, in part because of her continuing depression.

One day Betty went to see her pastor, and, in counseling with him, told him about the painful memory she had of her father leaving, and of how she felt abandoned by him. Her pastor asked her to spend some time pondering and praying about the question, "Where was God at the moment of your conception?" And although that seemed a little weird to Betty, she took the assignment seriously. On the third day, as she thought deeply about the question, she suddenly began to cry, and an image occurred to her of how God was there loving her not only at her conception, but also at each moment of her life. That was the beginning of her ability to handle her baggage, and it began a repair of her marital relationship as well.

Our take home for today, then, is to remember that there are times when Jesus' instruction to take nothing with us ought to be obeyed almost literally. It's an opportunity to leave our baggage behind, so that we can learn to fully rely on and trust God. So let's embrace such opportunities when they come our way, and let's remember that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Amen.