

## Take Nothing

*Isaiah 66:10-14; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20*

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I wonder what they brought with them. And how did they decide what to take? It would have to be portable, small enough to fit in a pocket, knapsack or duffle bag. As they prepared to leave Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Mexico, from small towns or big cities, villages or rural outposts, did they go through their belongings carefully or in haste, deciding to take important documents, practical things, or personal mementoes? Did they have notes with emergency contacts, bring birth certificates or family photos? Water bottles, food and cell phones? What did they carry when they left their homes seeking hospitality only to become lambs in the hands of wolves?

I can't imagine it even as I can't stop imagining it.

Jesus instructs those going out in his name to take nothing: no moneybag, no suitcase, no shoes. Don't greet anyone along the way. Keep moving. Jesus tells them to leave their baggage behind and look ahead to where they've been sent. Accept the welcome of those who invite you in, don't fixate on those who don't. Share the same message to all you meet: The kingdom of God has come near. Don't worry about the response or the lack thereof. Keeping proclaiming it, keep going, keep preparing the way for the One who is to come.

I wish I could say I wanted Jesus' clarity of mission but, if I am being honest, I don't. Not really. I would rather stay in my comfortable home, air conditioned, safe, surrounded by sofas, beds, books, a stocked fridge and a closet full of clothes, too. Multiple cars in the driveway. Art on my walls. Glassware and dishes I rarely ever use. Secure, self-contained and self-sufficient. Or at least that's the illusion I can maintain with all my things surrounding me.

Is that why Jesus tells us to take nothing? Seems reckless, naïve, risky. Maybe that's his point. Go out into this world and cling to the near kingdom of God, to one another, to the hope for hospitality and the trust that God will provide. Know what it is to be that vulnerable and that dependent.

I confess, I don't even want to imagine it.

And yet, here it is, a second time in as many chapters: Take nothing. Rely on the hospitality of strangers. Trust in the power of God.

Imagine.

In the haunting book, *"All That She Carried"* Tiya Miles delves into the story of a simple, handsewn, cotton sack. It was discovered by a woman at a flea market among pillowcases, table clothes and other linens. The woman recognized its value, bought it, and then sold it for a small sum to the Middleton Place historic site in the low country of South Carolina. What makes this

simple object remarkable is the inscription, added seven decades after the sack was first made. Stitched on the sack is the following:

My great grandmother Rose  
 Mother of Ashley gave her this sack when  
 she was sold at age 9 in South Carolina  
 it held a tattered dress 3 handfuls of  
 pecans a braid of Roses hair. Told her  
 It be filled with my Love always  
 she never saw her again  
 Ashley is my grandmother  
 Ruth Middleton  
 1921

Ashley's sack has been displayed at Middleton Place and at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. Miles writes, "The object was a marvel despite its lack of physical luster. It moved the emotions of viewers; so many of them succumbed to sobs that Middleton Place curator Mary Edna Sullivan fell into the habit of handing out tissues beside the display. The powerful pull of the sack lay in the way it personalized and also materialized every parent's and every child's worst fear...A Civil War historian succinctly put it in a conversation we once had about the sack: 'It is the world's shortest slave narrative, stripped down to its essence, sent back to us through time like a message in a bottle.'" (pages 35-36)

I can't imagine it, even as I can't stop imaging it.

Maybe that's why Jesus tells his followers to take nothing, in solidarity with the lambs among wolves who lack everything. Take nothing and know what it is like to be vulnerable, dependent, reliant on the hospitality of strangers and the power of God.

Leave your baggage behind because the kingdom of God is near, the kingdom of God is here. The last will be first, the lost will be found, the hungry will be fed and the poor will get good news. The Savior born in a manger to parents forced to leave their home has come to save the world. If you can't let go of all that keeps you insulated and aloof, wrapped in the illusion of self-containment and self-sufficiency, you may be left in the dust, comfortable but utterly clueless of the better abundance Jesus came to give.

CNN reported, "A local businessman described the back road where the semitruck was abandoned as "*la boca del lobo*" in Spanish, or "the mouth of the wolf," because it is remote and pitch black."

On Tuesday, San Antonio resident Angelita Olvera left two colorful crosses in honor of the victims near the site of the latest tragedy.

“I didn’t know them,” she told CNN of the victims. “They are sons, mothers, fathers and grandchildren.”

Pope Francis, via Twitter, urged prayers “for these brothers and sisters who died following their hope of a better life.” <https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/29/us/san-antonio-migrant-truck-deaths/index.html>

And Jesus says to his followers: Take nothing. Get moving. Go together. Tell the world the kingdom of God is near. Be vulnerable. Accept the kindness of strangers, rely on the power of God. Leave your baggage behind, whatever is holding you back from the work of healing and hope-giving, wholeness and demon defeating, go stand with the lambs in the very mouth of the wolf.

Don’t imagine your money or your knapsack, your multiple pairs of sandals or your storage units full of stuff will keep you secure or give you life eternal and abundant. Rejoice not in success but in the knowledge that you are named, claimed and loved and sent by the One who came for the sake of the world. Let this truth set you free from the baggage that keeps you from going in Jesus’ name to feed and tend his sheep.

What did they take for their journey? Did someone lovingly pack them a bag with clothing, food, a lock of hair and unending love? What did they pray as they set out or as they huddled in the mouth of the wolf? **Padre nuestro que estás** or Dios te salve Maria or El Senior es mi pastor?

Did they feel the kingdom of God was near?

I can’t imagine it, even as I can’t stop imagining it.

Tiya Miles shares the wisdom of novelist Ursula Le Guin who reminds us that a sack is a thing that carries something else. “a book is a sack; a medicine bundle is a sack; a house is a sack; a church is a sack; even a museum is a sack. We must add, too, that the earth is a sack. All are containers for carrying.” (page 276)

“Containers hold any and all things together in place, and over time, instantiating whole, new, unexpected creations. Carrying a sack of these laden things, despite the weight of the burden, means bringing this hidden potential for new kinds of wholeness with us...Can we commit our imaginations—like Rose, Ashely and Ruth once did—to packing the sacks, carrying the seeds, and stitching the cloths of tomorrow? All of our past, what we have valued and what we have undervalued, must be brought along this way, tucked and pressed inside the shelters of our story sacks. For, in our collective quest to survive with peoples and planet held intact—nothing is immaterial.” (277)

The kingdom of God is near. Emmanuel, incarnate, in the flesh, fully human, in order to redeem all humanity, all creation. Nothing left behind. No one not included. This is our story, the one held in the church, the one we have been sent into the world to proclaim in word and in deed, the one that burns in our bones, the one written on our hearts, the one we are called to carry, a gift, a responsibility, a light burden so powerful it can slay demons and drive Satan out of heaven. The story that saves. The story that heals. The story that makes us whole and makes us

yearn for all to be well. The kingdom of God is near, the time is now: Leave behind your baggage and take nothing but the saving love of Jesus Christ to a world desperately in need of life, abundant, eternal and for everyone, knowing we are not self-sufficient, never self-contained, nor do we have to be. We have been given each another and the power of the gospel, all we need to reveal the very near kingdom of God that makes lions and lambs lie down together, and, we pray, the wolves, will be there, too.