

SERMON: 2018/07/08 (7th Sunday aft. Pentecost, Yr. B - Track 1) - 2 Samuel 5:1-5,9-10, Psalm 48 & Mark 6:1-13

[Invite children to the front.]

David - who killed Goliath - was anointed king of Israel by Samuel when he was still a young boy, and before any of his adventures had brought him fame.

But we hear today how the bravery he went on to show on the battlefield against many different adversaries *proved* to the Kingdom of Israel that God had picked the right man for the job.

Now, there was one more important thing to do: he needed an impressive capital to compliment his new position, and he chose Jerusalem [show photo of (modern) Jerusalem.], which was known as "Jebus" [see: 1 Chron. 11:4], and he captured it very easily despite the fact that it was surrounded by 'strong', high walls, and situated on top of a very tall hill.

Indeed, the people who lived there jeered at him, saying "Ha ha! You can't get in here. Our city is too tough for you. Even if we were blind and our arms didn't work, we would still be able to keep you out!" [2 Sam. 5:6]

But he did succeed.

Do you know how?

David was very clever: he chose a team of his best soldiers - commandos - to sneak up an underground cave filled with water, and they attacked *from the inside!* [v.8]

And it has been the *greatest* city to the Jewish people ever since: they've lived there for *thousands* of years, despite lots of invasions by foreigners; and in the Bible, as we just heard [Ps. 48], God calls it by a *special* name, "Zion," and promises that it will *always* belong to them, which is why we are told to make a special effort to '[p]ray for the peace of Jerusalem', [Ps. 122:6].

Let's do that: [Add prayer for the safe return of the Thai boys in the cave: <https://www.yahoo.com/news/thai-cave-rescue-live-latest-091400285.html>]

.... in Jesus' name, amen.

[Ask children to leave.]

Jesus, having now spent *some* time training and nurturing His (twelve) Apostles - although not a *great* deal (of it), frankly, which is an interesting matter, really, itself worthy of discussion for another occasion - "sent" them out in teams of two to do *exactly* as He had been doing, which was to evidence the real love of God for humanity by various acts of mercy, both supernatural and mundane, *but principally*, notice, with a message - a message 'that all should repent', [Mk. 6:12]. *And this* remains our priority today and until eternity. That (unique) message and its promulgation.

But what I'd like us to focus on together is the advice He gave them (for their mission), which was to go and share the Gospel with 'no bread, no bag, no money...[only] sandals...[and] two tunics', [v.8-9].

Now, some interpreters have found in this verse a paradigm that all Christ-followers are supposed to slavishly conform themselves to; seeing it as an explicit endorsement (to us) of our Savior's lifestyle as it emerges in the New testament - his rustic, propertyless, unadorned 'hand-to-mouth existence.' [n.1]

And *certainly* we are supposed to model ourselves on Him. WWJD? is a *great* starting place for anyone looking to thoroughly please God. But this verse, actually, *isn't* 'intended to be a universal rule, binding on all disciples at all times...'; [n.2].

I say that because, to be precise, we aren't carrying out the *exact* same ministry - theirs was an *itinerant* one as His was: *constantly* on the move, *constantly* being chased from town to town by critics looking to entrap and imprison them; and this, (I don't need to tell you), *isn't* our situation.

I think it would be a mistake, then, to say that the same conditions of material impoverishment that *they* adopted *must* (automatically) apply to us: *our* approach to life in this place doesn't demand it in the same way.

And what, ask yourself, was Jesus actually saying when He 'ordered them to take nothing'? [v.8]

Was this *at that moment* His teaching for their entire lives?

The model for all times and seasons and contexts?

Or was He, in fact, (merely) suggesting that they "pack light"? [n.3]

Ever done that?

The Randall Family are almost masters at it: we usually only take "carry-on" items for stowage in the overhead bins, and resign ourselves to a "spot" of ironing and sink-washing at our destination, but the advantages of not being encumbered with thick, strap-splitting, back-wrenching suitcases are clear.

And this is what is really being advocated.

Jesus was saying to the Apostles, don't take all your stuff and the kitchen sink; you don't need it.

Go ahead and *rely* on the kindness of strangers to make up for what you lack; and concentrate instead on what matters most of all: calling people to abandon their sinful lives so as to be rewarded with a new kind of beautiful existence possible only in relationship with the Heavenly Father.

But, this isn't to say that Jesus doesn't care about modern Christians accumulating endless goods and riches; that He's indifferent to questions of abundant wealth in a world of desperate need:

'Historically,' of course, 'Christians have distinguished themselves considerably from their surrounding cultures by championing concern for the poor...in ways that other world religions and ideologies typically have not.'^[n.4]

And 'what never appears in the Gospels are well-to-do followers of Jesus who are not simultaneously generous in almsgiving and in divesting themselves of surplus wealth for the sake of those in need.'^[n.5]

This is what we need to keep in *sharp* focus; *this* is what we need to constantly to remind ourselves of - that if we have been blessed in this world it is *purely* so that we can bless others.

Because, let's face it, we'd rather ignore the 'prophetic recklessness' that Jesus calls for: the 'uncalculating generosity..., which gives without thought of return.'^[n.6]

And so, throughout the Church's history, the Holy Spirit has constantly sent men and women to point us back to that truth.

In the fifteenth century, one of these voices was Jan Hus, a popular Czech priest in Bohemia; and the (six-hundred-and-third) anniversary of his death was Friday.

He has been called 'the first Protestant'^[n.7], and in Prague he loudly challenged his contemporaries to rediscover (again) the (material) modesty and simplicity of Jesus' example.^[n.8]

The hierarchy, however, didn't listen.

Instead, they invited him to an examination in Konstanz in Freiburg where he was ambushed, condemned, and burned at the stake.

Then, 'After everything had been [reduced] to cinders with fire and when the dust of the earth had been dug up to a great depth and set in a cart, ...they scattered it

in the Rhine flowing past', [n.9].

This news horrified his friends and supporters back home [n.10] - where it seems to have converged with a nascent nationalism[n.11], and they rose up in rebellion against the German aristocracy that ruled them, and besieged their castles. Throwing some of them out of windows[n.12], these "Hussites" then established a "radically" egalitarian regime, which at least one author calls 'communist'. [n.13]

(This experiment was all too idealistic for the traditional powers, and Rome launched *five* brutal [although unsuccessful] crusades to crush the movement, [n.14].)

Was it all a horrible, misguided mistake?

No.

Consider their motivation: to bring glory to the Creator - for whilst the Lord 'does not explicitly forbid all private property, [He] gets close to it.' [n.15]

(Look at *Matthew 6*, 19, for example.)

And so though *we* need not *necessarily* relinquish *all* of our possessions, we should certainly pray - earnestly - to have a similar, consuming, unqualified, joy-giving enthusiasm for Him as they had.

Footnotes:

1. France, R. T. (1979), 'God and Mammon', *The Evangelical Quarterly*, Volume 51, No. 1, pp. 3-21, 7.
2. Cole, R. Alan (2008), *Mark (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries:)*, Downers Grove, I. L.: InterVarsity Press, 173.
3. See: Schnabel, Eckhard J. (2017), *Mark (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Volume 2)*, Downers Grove, I. L.: InterVarsity Press, 138.
4. Blomberg, Craig L. (1999), *Neither Poverty Nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions*, Nottingham, U. K.; Downers Grove, I. L.: Apollos (InterVarsity Press), 21.
5. *Ibid.*, 145. (My italics.)
6. France (1979), 15.
7. Rives, Standford (2008), *Did Calvin Murder Servetus?*, Charleston, S. C.: BookSurge Publishers, 65.
8. Fudge, Thomas (2010), *Jan Hus: Religious Reform and Social Revolution in Bohemia*, London, New York, N. Y.: I. B. Tauris & Co., Ltd., 64.
9. Haberkern, Phillip N. (2016), *Patron Saint and Prophet: Jan Hus in the Bohemian and German Reformations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 29.
10. Holeton, David and Vlhová-Wörner (2015), 'The Second Life of Jan Hus:

Liturgy, Commemoration, and Music', in Šmahel, František & Pavlíček, Ota (Eds.), *A Companion to Jan Hus*, Leiden, The Netherlands; Boston, M. A.: Brill, pp. 289-324, 303.

11. Heymann, Frederick G. (1975), 'The Crusades Against the Hussites', in Setton, Kenneth M. & Hazard, Harry W. (Eds.), *A History of the Crusades, Volume III: The 14th and 15th Centuries*, Madison, W. I.: The University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 586-646, 588.
12. Fudge (2010), 165.
13. Kaminsky, Howard (1967), *A History of the Hussite Revolution*, Eugene, O. R.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 385.
14. See: Heymann (1975).
15. France (1979), 13.