

When Trudy and I downsized after my retirement in 2013
and we packed everything up to move into our new digs here on the coast,
I was amazed at the amount of stuff we had accumulated
over the 15 years we lived in our townhouse in Vancouver—
and was equally amazed at what would be involved now
in moving to a renovated cottage less than half the size
with what was twice the amount of stuff it could hold.

And I couldn't help thinking back then. . .and still occasionally remember now
when I see or pass cyclists on their bike trips up the coast—
I could help and can't help thinking back to the time
when Trud and I took a cycling holiday down the Oregon Coast. . .
when we were much younger and well before we had children.

And in comparison to our 2013 post-retirement move,
one of the most difficult things about touring on a bicycle
is not the pedaling itself (although that is hard work)—
but it is trying to pack everything that you think you will need
into a few small pouches or saddlebags to hang on the bikes.

A tent, poles, rain-fly, stove and fuel, pots, pans, dishes, water,
freeze-dried food, sleeping bags, foam pads, shirts, jackets, pants, socks,
rain-gear, first-aid equipment and tools for repairs:
the list of things to take seems endless and the packs get bigger.

But the really crucial thing is not just to travel lightly but to make sure
you have all the essentials—and **only** the essentials—
because everything you pack at home has to be carried up the hills. . .
and Oregon's Coast has some very demanding climbs--
a geographical reality that is a very powerful incentive
to pack as lightly as possible.

At the same time, however, even though we tried to take as little as possible,
it was and is necessary to try and anticipate most of the needs or problems
one might encounter along the way—
whether that is a flat tire or a broken brake or derailleur cable,
a dog-bite on a stiff and sore leg or a camp-ground built on gravel.

In other words, it is important to take only what you need
but it is equally important to use what you take. . .
otherwise you will have carried all those extra supplies
up and over hills for absolutely no good reason.

And, let me assure you, that two pounds of useless gear at home
 seems to change miraculously into the weight of a piano
 when you are struggling to peddle or push your bike
 up a steep and long and winding Oregon road.

I guess that's the way most of us are, not only with trips,
 but with regular, everyday living—
 trying to pack into life everything we will need
 so that no emergency will catch us unprepared.

And so we have medical insurance for while we are alive
 and life insurance for when we die;
 cost-of-living allowances for when we are working
 and pension plans for when we retire;
 woolen coats to keep us warm and air conditioners to keep us cool;
 rich food to keep us fat and health spas to keep us thin;
 comfortable houses to keep us home and nice cars to get us away;

full cupboards to feel secure, and empty wallets to prove we're not wealthy;
 savings accounts to make us thrifty and inflation to gobble up our savings;
 medicine to keep us healthy and stress-related ulcers to keep us sick.

We spend hundreds, maybe even thousands on gyms and vitamin supplements
 to put and keep us in good shape. . .and thousands more on funeral directors
 to put us away looking good--and all of these we consider essential
 to a happy and successful life—
 a life where every need is anticipated, every problem encountered,
 and every solution provided for ahead of time.

As a result, we have the confidence. . .or the illusion. . .
 that life is a very secure and safe journey—
 a journey in which all of our bases are covered.

“He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff:
 no bread, no bag, no money in their belts.”
 Imagine! No food, no beggar's bowl, no cash in their pockets. . .
 nothing except a stick.

They are not to see themselves as professional preachers
 who travel around from crusade to crusade;
 they are not to become set in their ways
 or secure in their accommodations.
 Instead, they are to preach repentance
 and proclaim the arrival of the reign of God.

If they are welcomed in a town, they are to stay in one house
 as long as they are in that town, and not look around
 for more comfortable lodgings or more agreeable hosts.

And if they are not welcomed, then they are to shake the dust off
 their only pair of sandals as a sign to the people in that town
 that they are under God's fierce judgement.

No security, no snacks, no extra clothes, no spending money at all.
 Nothing except a stick.

They are to be completely dependent
 upon the hand of God and the generosity of others
 to supply their every need and fill their every want.

Well, we say, that was fine for disciples back then,
 but we can't live like that today.

I mean, we need a house or an apartment, a car or at least a bus pass,
 a decent wage, cable TV and high-speed internet;
 at the minimum, several changes of clothing and shoes,
 registered retirement savings plans
 and fridges and freezer full of meat and vegetables.

We need those things, don't we? We can't live without them, can we?

People would think we were crazy, wouldn't they?

God helps those who help themselves, doesn't she?

Things have changed for God's children, haven't they?

Surely God doesn't expect us to live that way anymore, does he?

I mean, after all, we can't be sure that God
 will take care of us completely, can we?

But, you know, when we sit down and really think about it,
 isn't it strange for us to believe that in terms of the stuff
 that really counts, that is really significant—
 like life and health, joy and contentment,
 forgiveness, peace of mind and hope for the life to come:
 Isn't it peculiar for us to believe that God has given us
 all these big things as gifts but can't or won't take care of us
 when it comes to the little things?

Isn't that odd? That we have such a craving, a hunger, a need
 for security and safety that we can't even allow ourselves
 to trust the One who has created us, who keeps us alive,
 and who is working out a plan and a means
 of giving us a new life both before and after death?

Imagine how silly it must sound to God's ears--
 to hear us murmur under our breath or in the silence of our hearts
 that the God of eternity can't be trusted by people who live to be 80 years old.
 Isn't that nonsensical? Isn't that sad? Isn't that. . .well, fill in the blank.

Maybe that's why it isn't one bit surprising
 when so many of us experience the stress and strain
 of depression or fear or anxiety or uncertainty—
 worrying about how we will make it through the month,
 worrying about the kids or about retirement funds,
 worrying about the house or the car or the bank balance,
 worrying about what will eat or drink or wear,
 worrying about whether, like Gwen, we will go sleep
 and might never wake up. Worrying, worrying, worrying.

Look! Even though I am as guilty as the next person
 when it comes to “worrying” or fretting about this or that,
 I can't help concluding the the main reason we worry
 is because we think that we have only ourselves
 and our own resources to fall back on in time of trouble--
 that God's grace isn't sufficient for us. . .
 that God's strength and power aren't strong enough for us
 to take care of us. . .to hold us up. . .to hold us together.

Because, you know, that is all that God really wants from us and wants for us:
 To take us by the hand and lead us. . .to assure us that we can depend on
 and rely on the divine ability and willingness to provide for us. . .
 that we can live from hand-to-mouth. . .from God's hand to our mouths--

 that we can trust God's promise to take care of us today. . .
 and, should we be fortunate enough to wake up tomorrow,
 to trust that God will be there with us and for us then as well.

The story is told of a father who put his four-year old on top of the fridge
 and then said “Jump, son! Jump into my arms. Daddy will catch you.”
 Somewhat fearful but confident of his father's strength,
 the little boy leaped from the fridge. . .and crashed right on to the floor,
 because his father had stepped away.
 “Now,” said his father after the boy stopped crying,
 “Let that be a lesson to you. Never trust anybody.”

This morning Jesus comes in bread and wine to assure us
that we can trust him no matter what. . .because, by means of his dying and rising,
and by means of our sharing in that dying and rising
at that font and at this table—
that we are “in him” and “with him” and he is in and with us.

He comes to us this simple and common meal to promise us
that we can trust that his grace is enough for us,
to trust that his power and strength are made perfect in our weaknesses,
to trust that his love for us is greater than our fears. . .
to trust that, even when all we have is a little bit of faith and a stick—
that that’s enough. . .that that is enough.

Amen.

SDG