

Hymns:

Hymn 75	From all that dwell below the skies
Hymn 26	I rejoiced when I heard them say
Hymn 564	O thou who camest from above
Hymn 736	In heavenly love abiding
Hymn 247	I danced on the morning

Readings: 2 Samuel 5.1-5, 9-10
Mark 6.1-13

“From dust we came”

Prayer

Holy God, break your word among us as bread for the feeding of our souls. And may the words of my lips, and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord our strength, and our redeemer. AMEN.

‘He called the twelve, and began to send them out, two by two: He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff, no bread, no bag, no money in their belts, but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics.’

Friends, I try not to disobey such direct commands, when Jesus gives direct commands – especially as he does not actually give that many of them so when he does, I feel little like I should pay attention.

But I have to say this is one I am struggling with, and I will confess to you I have every intention to break his command, and even today.

My husband Keith and I are going camping for the next ten days, with a tent and everything else in rucksacks, we are on the train to France even thisafternoon. And we are not taking a lot – having to carry it all does focus the mind, and I find that all the cute bits and bobs without which my daily routine would seem desperately impoverished here at home, they some how seem less necessary when I get above 20 Kg on my back.

But even still, I’m looking at Jesus’ instructions, and I am humbled. Take no bread – no bag, no money – wear sandals and just one change of clothing.

Well I have even in our modest packing much more than that – first of all, of course, we have our passports and our tickets. That’s most important. Otherwise, how will people know who we are, and what protection would we have?

My goodness, if we had no passports, no tickets we would suddenly be a different kind of traveller – the kind that gets stopped at borders. The kind that moves quietly by night.

What protection would we have, without the passports and tickets, and I'm bound to say, our credit card and some cash as a backup.

What protection, indeed. It is a serious question, friends. For those of us who want to follow Jesus. What protection do we have? That's point one for today.

But come with me to the other reading for a minute.

Friends, all during this heat wave, which has lasted several weeks now, we have been working our way in the lectionary readings through the story of Samuel complaining to God that the people want a King – we want to be a big people with boundaries and courts and economy and make other nations afraid! and God saying Alright then, give them a king – and Saul being anointed.

And then Saul's downfall, mainly because he did exactly what Samuel said a king would do – and David's anointing. You remember how Samuel went to Jesse, and found David who was the youngest son – hadn't even been called in from the fields.

In between there's been a bit with a battle and a big warrior called Goliath – and now today, finally, we have David recognised as King by the people. He is thirty years old, and will reign for 40 years.

And we know, because we have read ahead, that he is going to get into just as much trouble as Saul did – over other people's wives and roof gardens and fields. And have heartbreak in his own family.

But here we are today – a day of forming and gathering, a day where the scriptures are about beginnings – about Jesus, who is the descendent of David - sending his disciples as representatives of a different kind of King.

Back to our packing, mine and Keith's. We aren't taking a lot of clothing, but we are planning ahead – we're camping of course, and the weather might, please God might finally change – so we have waterproofs, and a jumper, and socks and shoes.

Not to mention our tent – which is a marvel of modern design – lots of Velcro and colour coding so you can't get lost putting it up.

Jesus sent them two by two – well we are going as a two, and I hope we come home as two, but to help that happen I can tell you now we will not be putting the tent up together – oh no – early in our relationship we tried that once, and the two together became one shouting and one stamping away in a huff and no tent.

Now we know it is ok for one of us to put up the tent, by himself, and the other to say absolutely nothing, not one word except 'Well done.'

My goodness, what can Jesus mean, wanting them to be unprotected – properly unprotected – and added to that, to have the discipline of having to work together. That's point two for today. And I've already confessed to you that I am going to break BOTH of these directions before the day is out, just going on my holiday.

Fortunately, my church is doing a better job than I am, of responding to Jesus.

This week the Methodist Conference had such a wonderful demonstration of this – in its testimony – really moving especially to see folk share experience around the report of the marriage and relationships task force – lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans members of the church speak about Gods grace, and Methodism, and welcome – sometimes hurt, and mainly love – and to feel the church try to walk together, the discipline of it. And the grace of it. GO on the Conference website, listen to the debates, and the testimony – I was proud of our church. I know there is anxiety about talking about this of course.

How much worry for disciples, sent out two by two, is actually about taking the first step, about whether I am going to offend my walking partner – and actually once we get going much of that worry goes away.

Because God has given me this partner to walk with. Even if he turns out to be that guy – and we all know one – maybe we are one – that guy who hums all the time without realising, and never really gets to a tune?

So Jesus sends the disciples together, two by two. Watching over one another, with the discipline of learning from each other as a spiritual gift – part of our mission, not a distraction, not an add on, but fundamental to who God is calling us to be in the world.

Well, sorry Jesus, my church might have agreed to walk together in a way that makes me proud, but I've already decided I am going to ignore better than half of your instructions on my holiday – and if I'm wearing sandals it is only because I really like my sandals, and they are frankly the most comfortable shoes in the heat anyway. Can I get some sandal credit, atleast?

Come back to the other reading. It says David built the greatest city – and he became greater and greater. He made his mark on the place such that a thousand years later people would tell the stories and sing the songs and say DAVID – he made this.

Own it. Build it. Make a legacy. Make an empire. Have big castles and fortifications and embassies overseas and golf courses where you can send your king to visit and say 'we are here, we own this' and this is what David did. That's one kind of King.

But Jesus, his descendent - says, when you get to a place, stay in the first house that will have you. You'll need to ask for help – your presence, as you are sent by Jesus, will give people a chance to be kind. Your vulnerability will call protection out of others.

After the Manchester bombing at the Ariana Grande concert last year, there was lots of talk about not trusting Muslims – protecting. And then there was one young man, a Muslim, who went and stood in Market street.

And he put on a blindfold, so he could see nothing. And he stood with a cardboard sign that said 'I am a Muslim and I trust you. Do you trust me enough for a hug?'

He was there for hours – you can look up his video blog about it – with the film of what happened. He told the newspaper,

“The first 30 seconds were nerve racking, but once I got that first hug with a lovely comment from that gentleman in my video, it made me feel a whole lot better”.

”With every hug, the comments I received were amazing, some were getting all teary and it's not hard to tell by a person's hug and tone of voice how much better their and my day became because of this.

“I did not expect so many people to come and hug me, let alone give me such positive comments, but it was the best thing I've ever done.”

Jesius sent his disciples unprotected, first point. Together, second point. And trusting strangers – third point.

What an odd King – well – this is only Joseh's son, after all – we don't really have to listen to him, do we?

Here's the last bit, back to the sandals. In genesis, God shapes the dust into a human form, and puts God's image on that dust – breathes the Spirit into that dust.

Dust is the stuff of first creation. From dust we came, to dust we will return, we know this. We won't take passports or money or tunics or even sandals with us.

And not every place is welcoming to people who are unprotected, who trust, who work together. But if we shake the dust from our feet, know that we did not bring the dust, that stuff of first creation with us – God was already there.

And we do not take it away – the dust is still there. And God waits to make a new king. Something different than empire.

Because friends it is of course right to bring a tent, and my passport, and a change of shirt on holiday.

But we are already protected. We are already accompanied, we are already fed, already housed.

I hope you will have a wonderful week this week, and I'll let you know how we get on, and maybe just maybe the heat wave will break and the cool rain will pour down on the dust of this city and bring to life the sleeping seed that is in it, and maybe new things will begin.

God bless you all.