

Packing For The Journey

Some of you may know that before I was in ministry, I was a high school teacher. And, I remember that the last few days of June were always crazy. It was almost impossible to get students to focus. There was an energetic buzz in the hallways, and you felt like you should be humming, *“School’s Out For Summer.”*

Perhaps this year things have been a little different with on-line learning. Covid has changed everything. But, perhaps more than ever, we need to take the summer to refresh and rejuvenate. Summer is a chance to rest – we hope for the warm weather, for longer days, for the opportunity to spend time with friends and family, perhaps gathered around the Bar B Q or firepit – and maybe for the chance of a summer holiday as restrictions begin to open up. I know that I am looking forward to getting up to the cottage in August.

Is anyone here going on holiday this summer? Where to?

Is anyone on holiday right now, and joining us as a visitor?

God tells us that we should take a holiday – a rest from our labours. The bible tells us that God rested on the 7th day – and personally I think God deserved a rest after all the work of creation. In our gospel lesson, Jesus talks about needing rest from all the worries and burdens that we carry. He said:

“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Sometimes when we take a break from our daily routine, whether we go away or not, we have the chance to let go of some of the things that drag us down and that can cause stress in our everyday lives. Maybe it’s the change of scenery, or the change in routine. I know that when our family are at our cottage, life just seems to change - it’s a slower pace, we’re more relaxed, we enjoy the water, playing games at night, sitting around the campfire – and to be honest, we all seem to just get along much better. Somehow, we are able to let go of the burdens that might separate us from our relationships with each other, and our relationship with God.

I was thinking, if maybe we could name those burdens, then it might help us in the letting go. So – I have a backpack full of burdens here –(ask someone to try it on and see how heavy it is.)

You see, burdens are heavy. But wouldn't it be good if we could lighten the load by giving these heavy burdens to God?

(Unpack the backpack full of bricks – one by one read what is written on the brick, and ask a member of the congregation to come forward and place the brick at the alter if that is a burden that they can identify with)

A busy job with long hours

Financial debt

Concerned about the health of loved ones

Exams

Personal health and fitness

An argument with a friend

Family relationships

Moving home

Parenting a teenager

A new baby

Growing old

Grieving the loss of a loved one

Redundancy

God tells us that we can bring all these things to God, and let go of them! We don't need to hold onto them and carry them around with us. God doesn't want us to be weighed down with anxiety and worry. We have to trust that God can, and that God will take our burdens from us! We need to let them go, and then we are able to travel much lighter.

(pick up back pack and see how light it is)

But during our time of relaxation and renewal, if we want to truly take time to restore our relationship with God, then we do need to 'pack for our journey.' So, I was wondering - what might be good to take with us if we want to intentionally travel with God this summer?

I've placed some things among the congregation that might be useful, and I thought the children could collect them one by one to place them in the backpack. So raise your hand if you have an item near you.

(each comes forward with the item and says what it is use and why it is useful. Then read the scripture attached to it.)

A map to help us find our way (*Jesus said "I am the Way" John 14:6*)

A Bible to guide us through good and bad times (*The Psalmist wrote "The word is a lamp to my feet and light for my path" Psalm 119*)

A torch to light our path (*Jesus said "I am the light of the world" John 8:12*)

A bottle of water to quench our thirst (*Jesus said "whoever drinks of the water that I give him, will never be thirsty again." John 4:14*)

Chocolate to share with people we meet (*Jesus said "give and it will be given unto you" Luke 6:38*)

A tarp to shelter us from the storm (*"Jesus rebuked the wind and said the sea 'Peace be Still" Mark 4:41*)

A notebook to write our thoughts, and prayers (*The Psalmist wrote "Be still and know that I am God" Psalm 46:10*)

A bucket and spade so we can be like children (*Jesus said "receive the kingdom of God like a child" Mark 10:16*)

Sun cream so we can soak up God's creation (*The Psalmist wrote "The heaven's declare the Glory of God and the sky proclaims God's handiwork." Psalm 19:1*)

You see, we do need some things if we want to intentionally journey with God. Things that will help us reflect on how loved we are as children of God. Things to remind us that God will take care of us, that God will restore us, and that God will give us the courage and strength to move on.

God does want us to take time to rest; to allow ourselves some time apart to mend our souls and to tend our bodies.

At the cottage next month I will be taking time to explore a different spiritual practice each day – a time that I can intentionally be with God in body, mind and spirit.

Perhaps for you it may be building sandcastles on the beach with the family, or spending time singing at a campfire, or Bar B Q-ing at the cottage, or journeying on a pilgrimage.

Today, we have offered our burdens to God by placing them at the altar. Now we are free to pick up our backpacks and to pack for our journey with God, and to declare the rest of the summer a 'holy day'! Amen.