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Traveling Light

Luke 4:30

Some of you will remember that during my renewal leave in the Spring of 2005 I visited a village in Germany where my great-grandmother was born. But I failed in my attempt to locate the German village where my great-grandfather was born. The village listed for him in our family records does not exist. This mystery was solved two weeks ago when I received an unsolicited email from a distant cousin who had found my Renewal Leave Report on the Westminster web site. His family records had the name of the village spelled differently than mine. It turns out that both spellings were wrong. He had located the passenger list for the ship on which they arrived and that took him to the immigration records for the Port of Baltimore. That record listed their village as Söllichau in the region of Saxony. It is located only 19 miles from Wittenberg where the Reformation began. We visited Wittenberg during our travels not knowing how close we were to my great-grandfather's roots.

After receiving this information I went to the library to verify it. There I obtained a photocopy of the original immigration record issued at the Port of Baltimore on July 8, 1865. The record gives the names and ages of each member of the family. My great-grandfather was the oldest of seven children. The record lists his father's occupation as farmer and the family's destination as St. Louis. There was one detail on that page that leaped out at me. The last column recorded what they brought with them. The entry said "three boxes." A family with seven children was traveling halfway around the world to start a new life bringing only three boxes. They were traveling light. They knew that the unknown challenges of the new world could not be met by bringing more stuff. They would live by their inner resources.

In the 4th chapter of Luke's gospel we find Jesus addressing the need to prepare for a new world. Jesus began his ministry in Galilee and then went home to Nazareth for a visit. On the Sabbath he went to his home synagogue to worship. The news had spread of the fabulous success of his ministry so the synagogue officials honored him by inviting him to read and interpret the scriptures. But somehow this opportunity to bask in the glow of the hometown supporters went awry. The happy homecoming turned into an ugly row.

Luke's description of the incident leaves us wondering how things got out of hand so quickly. The initial response to what Jesus had to say seems to have been very positive. But the tension began to build as Jesus observed that the worshipers were expecting him to demonstrate dramatic healings of the type that he performed in Galilee. Then Jesus suddenly declared his unwillingness to submit to such a test, citing certain incidents from the lives of the Old Testament prophets, Elijah and Elisha. This set off an emotional explosion in the synagogue. Tempers boiled over and Jesus' life was in danger. The worshipers became an angry mob bent on doing Jesus harm.

Jesus was pointing to the continuity between his ministry and that of the two prophets in reaching out to the Gentile population. In both cases God's grace was rejected by the chosen people. Grace was received by the foreigners. It was the foreigners who traveled light and were ready for their lives to be rearranged by grace. When Jesus recognizes that the people of his town are not ready for the

new world of God's grace he passes through the midst of them and goes on his way (paraphrase of Luke 4:30). Those who travel with him must give up the baggage of the old world where God is perceived as the protector of the *status quo*.

Our ministry at Westminster seeks to bear witness to God's new world of grace. Sometimes that means turning loose of what is safe and familiar. Sometimes that means being open and flexible as we prepare for a future that we cannot predict. We began preparing for that future at the beginning of this century when we decided to remain at this location and launch a two million dollar renovation of this building. We have continued those preparations with our successful debt retirement program which will give us greater flexibility in the years ahead. Today you will be hearing from the Strategic Planning Committee their vision for the future development of this site. It is a vision which is based less on specific expectations and more on the flexibility to respond to needs we cannot identify today. Again, the key is approaching the future with less baggage. We seek to move ahead with greater openness to the ways in which God is rearranging our world. We dare to travel light because we have already been claimed as sons and daughters of the living God.