

You want me to go where?

Nothing scared me more in school than hearing, "Close your books, take out a piece of paper and number 1-10 down the left hand column."

So today we are going to take a test. Let's see how many of you remember what we discussed last week. Last week was the first Sunday in Lent - a 40 day journey for us to prepare ourselves for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So, since we are going on a journey together, last week we packed our bags.

What did we bring?

Cross – Focus on _____ God/Christ

Pillow – Remember to _____ pray

Hat – Remember to take care of _____ ourselves

Crackers – To draw closer to God, we should take time to _____ fast

Church Roster – Remember that we aren't _____ alone

Bible / Daily Devotion – Help us concentrate on God's _____ Word

But with all of these items in our bag, there really wasn't room for Sins – so we put the sin on top of the suitcase to remember that sin is still out there, trying to get in.

The other item we had to leave behind was our guilt and our regrets. These are things that many of us carry with us wherever we go.

But during these 40 days, we are going to try to give them over to God and ask him to take our guilt – to take our regrets -- because if we are really going to take these remaining 31 days and focus on God, we really don't have room to bring our guilt and regrets along with us on this trip.

The Radical God!

In our scripture reading, God told Abram to leave his parents, leave his friends, leave his community – and take a trip with God. Nobody ever said taking a trip with God would be easy – but leaving your community behind could be pretty hard.

Think about it for a minute. If God spoke to you right now, today, and said get up, go – leave your house, leave your state; you know what?, leave your country! Feel free to take with you whatever you can fit in your car, including family members. But I want you to leave today and I'll show you later where I want you to go. But for now, just leave.

What would you do? Would you go? Would you stay? What would you take with you and what would you leave behind?

Then think for a moment, if we take these things with us, what would we have to leave behind?

Sometimes we have to give up things in our lives to truly follow God – and some of these things aren't easy to give up.

For example, to be a follower of God the Bible tells us to support those that help people, like our church and other charities. The Bible tells us to love others and treat them well – even to the extent that if someone wants to take away our shirt, give them our coat, as well. The Bible also tells us to give of our time to help others.

The Bible sure talks about us giving up a lot, doesn't it?

But then, since this is the Easter Season, it's important for us to remember that God gave up something for us. If we have forgotten, let's simply look at the cross to remind ourselves.

But, sure, we are still modern Christians, and many times we want to ask a reasonable question: "Sure, Christ died for us, but if I give up all of this – my money, my free time, my anger, my guilt, my sins, what's it in for me???"

It can be easy to think that way: "What's in it for me? What do I get out of it?" Many people think that by doing these things we can buy our way into heaven – but the second scripture that Jeanne read for us plainly states that just isn't so. It says that we aren't justified by our works – but by our faith.

So why bother doing all of these other things if we simply just need to believe? Sure, the Bible says we should do good things and help others, but if we are justified by God through our faith, who cares about our works? Boy, that sure would make being a Christian a whole lot easier, wouldn't it?

No more giving to the church or those pesky needy people, no more waking up early on Sundays, no more needing to be extra nice to others – we can just be ourselves.

And why not, the Bible says we are justified by our faith, not by our works.

But – then – I get thinking. What is faith without our works – without us working together for the betterment of God's world?

What if we were driving by I-10 and Cortaro and saw a man that held out a sign that said "Just Hungry". What if we looked at him and said, "Have faith – as a child of God - and hunger no more."

Or if we saw a homeless person shivering to death, if we said, "If you had faith in God you would feel the warmth of His love."

What is faith without works? I want to share a scripture with you, James 2:14-19.

Boy – that is a hard scripture – Faith without works is dead - or you can say that faith without works is empty.

James says that, "Hey, even the demons believe in God – come on – show your faith, live your faith."

We are all at different places in our faith journey, and we all have different abilities and gifts. God isn't asking us all to do the same thing to show our faith.

God asked Abraham to get up and leave his parents, his community and even his country – and follow God. Abraham didn't say to God, "You know what God, I believe in you, that's enough for me." No, he did what God was asking him to do.

God isn't asking us all to give \$1,000,000 a year to the church. God isn't asking us all to feed the world's homeless; he isn't even asking us all to be greeters on Sunday morning – although Mary Ware might ask you to do it.

But God is asking us to respond to our faith as we journey through life with him. He is asking each of us to show our faith by our works.

To answer the question I asked earlier, "What's in it for me?"

I truly feel that when we go out of our way to help others, when we show God's love, when we volunteer our time, and when we financially support our church and charities, I truly feel that there is a special reciprocal blessing that happens in our lives.

When we live our lives in the way God wants us to, when we take a journey with Him, our lives become more full, more blessed.

But how do we know what God is calling us to do?

Well, let's remember our suitcase. When we take a journey with God, when we focus on Him and pray, when we immerse ourselves in His Word, when we truly seek God out, he'll let us know what he wants us to do – where he wants us to go with Him.

It won't be a booming voice from heaven, but maybe a thought will pop into our heads, maybe someone will suggest we do something, and they didn't know that we had been contemplating the same thing already. Or maybe we have a gut feeling and we just know what God wants us to do.

That is why it is important for us to be in a journey with God and keep these means of Grace. Continuing in our journey with God helps us discern God's will for our lives.

We also need to remember that God knows what our abilities are; he knows our limitations, he even knows about our bad knees. But we need to remember that everyone has a place in the Body of Christ – no matter what their gifts are.

And that includes someone that has no worldly possessions, but prays for others, to the person that gives their entire lives as a missionary – everyone has a place in the body of Christ and everyone is equally important.

So during this Lenten Journey, and as people of faith, each of us need to ask ourselves, "Where is God leading me, and how do I respond?"

Pastor: Mark Maddox
520- 207-6453
pastor@umcSanctuary.org
www.umcSanctuary.org