

“Baggage: We All Have Some”

Matthew 11:27-30

April 3, 2016

Rev. Dave Baldrige

Palm Harbor United Methodist Church, Palm Harbor, Florida

(“Baggage” video by Jimmy Hudson)

Baggage---we all have some. Today begins a sermon series on Baggage. What baggage are you carrying? What is holding you back? What is weighing you down? How long have you been carrying your baggage? How can you let it go?

As you may have noticed I’ve been carrying baggage, literally, since the beginning of the service as a reminder that we all have baggage. Each and every one of us, including your pastor has baggage.

Now believe me it was hard to sing the first song, “I Am Free” carrying baggage. I really wasn’t free to run. I certainly wasn’t free to dance and well I really wasn’t free to really live for Jesus like the way He would want me to. It’s hard to be really free if we are lugging around luggage.

So we have baggage...the baggage of stress, regrets, doubts, fears, disappointments. This baggage affects our relationships. To be honest it gets tiring and old to keep carrying around baggage.

We have it set up like a Baggage Claim area. I hope by the end of the sermon series there will be baggage there left ‘unclaimed’-----are you with me? That we will drop our baggage or at least let Jesus help us carry it.

You see we don’t have to carry it, keep it, or repeat it. It’s time to get rid of the baggage.....oh, but that is so hard to do.

I got this suitcase from up in the attic. I didn’t notice until I brought it to church that it has a nametag on it with my Merritt Island address. Friends I haven’t lived in Merritt Island since 2003. A reminder of how long are we going to be carrying our baggage.

It is interesting this month that our 1st through 5th graders will be talking about Perseverance. Their theme verse for the month is Isaiah 41:31

Isaiah 40:31 New International Reader's Version (NIRV) 31 But those who trust in the Lord will receive new strength. They will fly as high as eagles. They will run and not get tired. They will walk and not grow weak.

I’ve never seen an eagle fly carrying luggage! You see it is hard to run when you have baggage. It is hard to walk and not grow weak when we have baggage. But in that verse, what is the key? Trust. Those who trust in the Lord WILL receive new strength. And yes it sometimes takes perseverance but we WILL get there.....fly high....but drop your baggage.

Allow me to paraphrase **Matthew 11:28**---Then Jesus said, **“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry BAGGAGE, and I will give your rest.”** Again notice in this scripture the word **WILL**. He **WILL** give you rest. He can help you drop the baggage or He can help you carry the baggage. Come, trust.

How will He do that? Well, our scripture has Jesus saying, “Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you...”

Jesus spoke language and used imagery that was common to his day. He mentions the ‘yoke.’ **(image)**. Jesus says to take His yoke and you will find rest for your souls. In fact He says that His yoke is easy and the burden is light.

A yoke is placed to assist you to carry or to guide you **(image with oxen)**. Trust and be guided by Jesus.

In the context of the passage Jesus is telling the people that the yoke of religiosity can wear you down. IT is weighty. There are all the do’s and don’ts...all the legalism and keeping the letter of the law. In fact in the Old Testament there were 613 commandments the people were supposed to keep. 613 laws. And we have problems obeying the speed limit! However, Jesus says it’s not about religiosity it is about relationship.

Check this out: **Matthew 22:36-40 New International Version (NIV)**

36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” 37 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

It kind of sounds like: Love God! Love All! Have you heard that before????? Rather than worry about the minutia of 613 commandments we have 2....Love God! Love all! Deepening the relationship with God and developing relationships with others.

Now I don’t know what baggage you have....except I know we all have some. Some of us, I’m afraid are trying to carry multiple bags. This doesn’t make you a bad horrible person....for we all have baggage...each and every one. However, Jesus wants to take that baggage from you.

Again, from the Old Testament hear these words from the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 43:1-3 New Living Translation (NLT)

43:1 “Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. 2 When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. 3 For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

He has called you by name. I saw this recently and I liked it: "Satan knows your name, but he calls you by your sin. Jesus knows you sin, but calls you by your name."

Deep waters.....He's with you. Rivers of difficulty....He is with you and you will not drown. Being oppressed you will not be burnt up---He says that He is the Lord YOUR God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

The following story is anonymous....but I can certainly see it happening. It kind of sums of how we handle our baggage.....and we all have some. Here's the story:

Recently, I had "one of those days". I was feeling pressure from a writing deadline. I had company arriving in a couple days and the toilet was clogged. I went to the bank, and the trainee teller processing my deposit had to start over three times. I swung by the supermarket to pick up a few things and the lines were serpentine. By the time I got home, I was frazzled and sweaty and in a hurry to get something on the table for dinner.

Deciding on Campbell's Cream of Mushroom Soup, I grabbed a can opener, cranked open the can, then remembered I had forgotten to buy milk at the store. Nix the soup idea. Setting the can aside, I went to plan B, which was leftover baked beans. I grabbed a Tupperware from the fridge, popped the seal, took a Look and groaned. .

My husband isn't a picky eater, but even HE won't eat baked beans that look like caterpillars. Really frustrated, now, I decided on a menu that promised to be as foolproof as it is nutrition-free: hot dogs and potato chips. Retrieving a brand new bag of chips from the cupboard, I grabbed the cellophane and gave a hearty pull. The bag didn't open. I tried again. Nothing happened. I took a breath, doubled my muscle, and gave the bag a hearty wrestle. With a loud pop, the cellophane suddenly gave way, ripping wide from top to bottom. . Chips flew sky high. I was left holding the bag, and it was empty. It was The final straw. I let out a blood curdling scream. "I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE!!!"

My husband heard my unorthodox cry for help. Within minutes he was standing at the doorway to the kitchen, where he surveyed the damage: an opened can of soup, melting groceries, moldy baked beans, and one quivering wife standing ankle deep in potato chips. My husband did the most helpful thing he could think of at the moment. He took a flying leap, landing flat-footed in the pile of chips. And then he began to stomp and dance and twirl, grinding those chips Into my linoleum in the process!

I stared. I fumed. Pretty soon I was working to stifle a smile. Eventually I had to laugh. And finally I decided to join him. I, too, took a leap onto the chips. And then I danced.

Now I'll be the first to admit that my husband's response wasn't the one I was looking for. But the truth is, it was exactly what I needed. I didn't need a cleanup crew as much as I needed an attitude adjustment, and the laughter from that rather funky moment provided just that.

So now I have a question for you, and it's simply this: Has God ever stomped on your chips? I know that, in my life, there have been plenty of times when I've gotten myself into frustrating situations and I've cried out for help, all the while hoping God would show up with a celestial broom and clean up the mess I've made of things.

What often happens instead is that God dances on my chips, answering my prayer in a completely different manner than I had expected, but in the manner that is best for me after all. Sometimes I can see right away that God's response was the best one after all.

Sometimes I have to wait weeks or months before I begin to understand how and why God answered a particular prayer the way He did. There are even some situations that, years later, I'm still trying to understand. I figure God will fill me in sooner or later, either this side of Heaven or beyond.

Do I trust Him? Even when he's answering my prayers in a way that is completely different from my expectations? Even when he's dancing and stomping, instead of sweeping and mopping? Can I embrace what He's offering? Can I let His joy adjust my attitude? Am I going to stand on the sidelines and sulk, or am I willing to learn the steps of the dance He's dancing' with my needs in mind?

I'll be honest with you: Sometimes I sulk. Sometimes I dance. I'm working on doing more of the latter than the former. I guess the older I get the more I realize that He really does know what He's doing. He loves me and I can trust Him. Even when the chips are down.

(anonymous from Internet)

But as I mentioned earlier it is hard to dance.....me always holding on to my baggage.

(place Baggage at Communion table....begin Communion liturgy)