

The Road Less Traveled – March 10, 2017

I had to make a quick trip to Florida this week. My Mom is ill, and things became critical Monday evening. I was in a church meeting when I got the call, so I texted Melissa and told her I thought I would need to make the trip sooner rather than later. By the time I got home around 9:30 Monday evening she had found me a flight that left DFW at 7:00 the next morning and would get me into Tampa by lunchtime.

As she was taking care of the flight, I was arranging for a rental car and reserving a space to leave my car in Dallas. By this time it was well after 11:00 p.m., and I knew I needed to leave the house in just a little more than 5 hours if I wanted to ensure I made the flight. That's when I climbed into the attic to retrieve a suitcase for the trip. I grabbed the smaller one -- the carry-on size -- so I would not have to mess with checking a bag. I opened the bag on the bed and headed for the closet. Then the real decision had to be made: What do I need to take?

That was really the question, probably more so this time than on most other trips. Most of the time packing is a team effort between Melissa and I. We discuss plans, negotiate over space in the bag, and in the end, pretty much take what we want. I'm the king of "just in case," so I inevitably end up taking too much. Luckily Melissa once worked for the Container Store, so she is the master of space utilization.

But not this time. This time I didn't have the time to explore every possible "just in case" scenario, and Melissa was busy doing other things to not only get me ready, but to ensure everyone got where they needed to go given my unplanned absence. So packing was up to me.

What do I need?

As I grabbed the basics -- a couple of pair of pants, shirts, underwear, socks, toiletries -- I was struck by how much extra I usually pack when I have the luxury of time and space. I take books, movies in case I get bored, extra shoes, shorts to change into at the end of the day, my laptop and my tablet, long neglected files from my office just in case I really get bored.

But Monday night, I just packed what I needed and was finished in less than 10 minutes. And as I finally laid down after midnight to grab a few short hours of sleep, I found myself reflecting on what we explored together on Sunday -- our struggle with contentment. Because it really does boil down to want vs. need. We struggle oftentimes because we believe that our happiness will be found in the things we want. We pursue those things relentlessly, as if our very worth as human beings depend on them. The problem, of course, is that there is an endlessly parade of things that promise us satisfaction. And as soon as we claim one, the next one appears just out of reach.

I believe that's what the Apostle Paul was getting at in the passage that I shared with you on Sunday. "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every circumstance," Paul tells the Philippian Christians, "whether full or hungry, whether having plenty or being poor. I can endure all of these things through the power of the one who gives me strength."

That one, of course, is Christ. Paul longs to know Jesus and the power of His resurrection. That's what he needs. That's all he needs. That's where real contentment is found.

May that be our prayer this Lenten season. Oh God, help us to know Christ and the power of His resurrection. Help us long for what we need.