

Proper 9 Year C
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Saint James, Wheat Ridge

By the Rev. Becky Jones

So, I was having lunch one day with Martha Stewart...

Really, it's true! I WAS having lunch one day with Martha Stewart. THE Martha Stewart, the one whose magazine is all about living the good life and surrounding yourself with quality food, making beautiful decorations for your home, and entertaining graciously.

You see, this was back in my newspaper days, when I was a writer for the *Rocky Mountain News*, and Martha came to Denver to promote her new cookbook. My boss thought it would be funny to send the reporter least equipped to appreciate Martha's mastery of the domestic arts to interview her. So naturally, she picked me.

But I went along with it. After all, I was a professional. I've written about a lot of things I didn't know anything about going in. But I learned.

Well, I took one look at her new cookbook and I knew I wouldn't be making any of her recipes. These were hard recipes. They weren't meant for beginning cooks. And they certainly weren't the kind of thing that cooks pressed for time would attempt. Martha's recipes tended to be all-day projects. There are no shortcuts in Martha's world. Everything's got to be from scratch, everything's got to be homemade.

There was one recipe that just stopped me cold. It was a recipe for, believe it or not, homemade marshmallows. Who in their right mind wants to make marshmallows from scratch? Don't the people at Kraft already make wonderful marshmallows? Is there ANYTHING to be gained by making your own?

I don't think so. But then, buying store-bought marshmallows just isn't something Martha Stewart would do.

I confess to you that I don't really like Martha Stewart. She makes me feel really inadequate, because when it comes to home-making I take a lot of shortcuts.

I thought of Martha as I read our Old Testament lesson this morning. I love the story of Naaman because he's such a lifelike character. I know people just like Naaman. I bet you do too. People with an overpowering sense of self-importance. People who've got to make everything difficult for those around them. People who can't believe that something good and worthwhile could be easy to obtain, who think it's only worth having if it takes a lot of effort to get. People like...Martha Stewart!

Just look at all the baggage Naaman is carrying with him.
That alone tells you he's pretty wrapped up in himself.
He takes with him 10 talents of silver
And 6,000 shekels of gold
and 10 sets of garments.

Now, a talent is a unit of weight measurement.
I did a little calculating
and figured out that 10 talents of silver
Would weigh roughly 1300 pounds.
That's a lot of silver to be toting around.

I don't know what silver was worth in Naaman's time,
But at today's prices, that's about \$380,000 worth of silver.

And he's carrying 6,000 shekels of gold.
That's about 220 pounds of gold.
Today, that much gold is worth over \$4 million.
And he's hauling it around with him!

No wonder he had to take multiple chariots
and multiple horses, and multiple servants to wait on him.
Naaman is a man with an ego,
a man who likes to show off his power and his wealth.

Anybody else like that come to mind?

And yet what good did it do him?

What did all that gold and silver buy him?

It could buy a lot,

but it couldn't buy him the thing he wanted most.

It couldn't buy him his health.

To get rid of his leprosy

he had to leave all that gold and silver sitting on the beach.

He had to take off one of those 10 sets of garments

and go presumably naked or nearly so,

go and wash in the river.

It was just that simple.

He had to take off all his finery

and leave his baggage behind on the beach.

I'd like to contrast Naaman's style of travel

with the way Jesus sends the 70 out in this morning's gospel.

Unlike Naaman, who carried loads and loads of baggage,

Jesus sent his followers out with nothing extra.

Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, he told them.

Wherever you stay, eat what they give you.

Don't be picky, don't go looking for nicer accommodations
or better food down the road.

Don't even worry about stuff like that.

Travel lightly.

Trust that your needs will be met.

Trust in others' generosity and hospitality.

Give up trying to control things.

Don't worry about fine clothing
or being important or being impressive.

Don't worry about whether the marshmallows
are made from scratch or come from the store.

Don't be weighed down with excess baggage.

What wonderful advice to us all
as we go off on our own journeys.

How many of us go through this life
weighed down with heavy baggage?

Maybe it's guilt.

Maybe it's anger.

Maybe it's pride.

Maybe it's disappointment.

Maybe it's unreasonable expectations of ourselves,
or an attachment to something we only think we need,
but in truth would be better off without.

Whatever it is, it's weighing us down.

It's preventing us from traveling lightly.

And yet we keep on carrying it because we think we must.

We keep on carrying it because
we think the road has got to be hard and the journey difficult
if it's to have any meaning.

We can't believe that all we have to do
is put it down,
then go and wash in the waters of salvation.

But that is the very invitation that our Lord puts before us.
We don't have to struggle under burdens that are too hard.
We don't have carry baggage that weighs us down.
We don't have to make this harder than it needs to be.

We don't have to make our own spiritual marshmallows
because our Savior has already done it for us.
Jesus has already done the hard part on our behalf.

So my invitation to you this morning
is to put down the baggage that you're carrying.
Put down the guilt.
Put down the pride.
Put down whatever it is that's weighing you down.
You don't need it.
You don't have to carry it.

Come and receive the gift of new life.
It's so, so simple.
As simple as stepping into a river.
As simple as receiving a bit of bread and a sip of wine.
As simple as looking up into heaven
and discovering that your name has been written there,

In the Book of Life,
all along,
and you didn't even realize it.
It is a sweet, sweet gift we've been given.
Sweet as a flowing mountain stream.
Sweet as a marshmallow.
Taste and see.