

Freedom to Travel Light

7 July 2019

Nurse Maude Sunday

Reading: Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

You can soon tell a real trumper from a novice. A real trumper packs light. When I was tramping the St James, we did share out the stuff. Ben my godson had the water, cans of fruit, rice pudding, Irish stew, the cooking stove and the first aid kit. My job was to bring the can opener. On arrival at the hut the other trampers teased us about all the stuff. One guy had tramped the length of New Zealand with only the clothes he stood up in and 2-minute noodles. “You can’t sustain yourself just on 2 minute noodles.” I told him. Anyway, he got the last laugh, because I had forgotten to pack the can opener.

Today in the Bible reading Jesus is sending his disciples out and he is urging them to travel light. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals. He sends 70 or 72 depending on whether you speak Greek or Hebrew, and this number is symbolic for all the nations of the world. All the people of the world are to hear about God’s love.

But what does travelling light look light in our context? Well today we again celebrate a remarkable woman. We know her as Nurse Maude. Like the 70 she was sent to cure the sick and to proclaim God's kingdom. A typical day for her would begin in prayer at the CSN with the Anglican nuns. Then she would go to the local vicar, the vicar of St Michael and All Angels, and get list of the sick. After that she would go on her rounds. When she entered a house, like the 70, she began by wishing peace on that house. She always started by saying prayers, then she would give medical treatment and then finally came the advice. She would simply tell the family what they must do to get better. She didn’t hold back. Initially she walked. Later she had a bike. Eventually others joined her, and she was given an Austin car. Known as much for her terrible driving as her Christian compassion she would stop in the middle of the road riding the clutch and greeting her many patients.

Nurse Maude, being a good Anglican, would have known today's Gospel so very well.

Henri Nouwen, one of my favourite Christian authors, writes about the burdens we carry that weigh us down. (I have set myself the task of reading everything that Henri Nouwen has written. This task has been made a lot easier since he died.)

Nouwen says there are three great burdens we carry around with us.

They are in no order: I am what I have; I am what I do; I am what others say or think about me.

We know this at parties. “What do you do?” is the question I get asked. At one party I said “Guess. You tell me.” So, they discussed it. “He’s obviously not a bodybuilder. He doesn't seem bright enough to be an accountant, but he is articulate. Maybe he’s a journalist.” It's Interesting that that we call Nurse Maude “Nurse Maude” . We have defined her for all of history as a nurse. But she was also a friend, a social reformer, an academic, a person of prayer, a much-loved daughter and, most important of all, a child of God. The great freedom of being a child of God, a beloved one of God, is that we are always more than what we do. We don’t need to lose ourselves when we retire or can’t find work or are too sick to work. We have our own dignity in God.

I am what I own. Nurse Maude owned very little. She relied on the generosity of others. The generosity of a few fellow Anglicans got her started. To start with she was only paid in kind or koha and yet she was rich because she believed in what she did. She could see, for all her lack of worldly wealth, the difference she was making in the lives of others. Our consumer society measures our value in what we have. Nurse Maude measured her life not in how much she had but in how much she gave.

Finally, the last great burden: we are what others think of us. Nurse Maude often stepped out of her role of ministering to the sick to embarrass the powerful. She took on the Hospital Board, a collection of the province's powerful people, over the state of the Christchurch hospital. It was a cold damp building right by the Avon. She nagged the government into action to set up a camp for the many dying of TB. She confronted the authorities to care for the victims of the deadly Spanish flu. In short Maude felt free to not worry about what others thought of her. She claimed her freedom in God. When we do this a very mysterious thing happens. The less we care about the opinion of others the more we become someone others admire. Just like the purse, the bag and the sandals that Jesus urges the 70 to be free of on their journey, we are to be free from the burden of measuring ourselves by what we own, what we do and what others think of us. Nurse Maude gives us a golden example of a life lived in the freedom of simply being a child of God.

The most important journey we can ever take is a journey of the heart. To come to know how much we are loved and cherished by God. This is the journey of a lifetime. And as we grow in the knowledge of the love that God has for us then we are set more and more free to enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God.

What is the reward for all this freedom and following anyway?

Well the Gospel reading ends with the 70 returning with joy at all they had seen and done in Jesus name.

And what of Maude? Well what joy we must know that over 200,000 nursing visits to homes are done in her name each year throughout Canterbury, Wellington and Nelson/Marlborough.

We are proud to have her at rest in our cemetery. May she rest in peace and rise in Glory.