

Jesus' highly mobile life and ours

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My husband and I recently relocated from Chicago to New York. Looking back, I realize that I have had ten different addresses in my life. This number strikes me as staggering, though it's by no means unusual. Many people, at least those of us in industrial societies, are creatures on the move.

I have experienced happiness in each of the places I've lived: childhood camaraderie in suburban Chicago; freedom and beauty along the lakeshore in Michigan; shared jokes and histories that come from student living. I am grateful for each of these spaces and experiences.

And yet each move entails loss. It involves leaving unique places and people. I am a sapling uprooted from its soil.

When I look at the Gospels, I am surprised by the role that movement plays. Jesus and his disciples travel continually throughout Galilee, Judea, and Samaria. He and his community do not have permanent homes. They travel from city to town and from sea to desert, healing, liberating, and announcing the good news of God's reign. They come to exhort and restore—to proclaim the capaciousness of God's love and the wideness of God's covenant. Their lives may lack geographic permanence, but they are imbued with God's presence.

A few qualities characterize their movement. First, **Jesus and the disciples travel within a network of friendship and hospitality.** Often they stay and rest with companions like Mary and Martha, or with welcoming relatives like Peter's mother-in-law. They rely on a web of relationships while strengthening and extending that web in the process.

I imagine this movement as an inspiration for the early church. It is the basis for the often quarrelsome, ever hospitable network of Christian communities that spread throughout the Roman Empire. It provides a different vision of travel—one that is

increasingly communal, rather than inevitably insular.

**Jesus also attends to his social and environmental wake.** When the disciples complain of the lack of hospitality in certain towns, Jesus asks them to consider how they might respond. In Luke 9, Jesus categorically rejects the disciples' suggestion that such cities ought to be destroyed. Jesus, quite simply, has no time for such nonsense. In Matthew 10, Jesus tells the disciples to shake the dust from their sandals as they leave an inhospitable village. This action marks the disciples' acceptance of being rejected, and it affirms the community's freedom not to receive them.

Yet it also challenges the disciples to a greater level of care. Considered alongside the passage in Luke, Jesus seems to be saying that not only should we not destroy those who are inhospitable, we should strive to prevent even the smallest amount of damage or disturbance. Jesus asks us to extend the utmost care to the places we pass through, to diminish not even the ground that we tread upon.

Likewise, **Jesus seeks out and celebrates the gifts of those he encounters.** As Jesus travels throughout the region, he meets many people whom others have overlooked. While others look down on Zacchaeus as a tax collector, Jesus sees someone perched in a tree who is capable of joyful hospitality. While others dismiss the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus finds someone who is thoughtful and worthy of conversation. When the leaders turn away from the woman who anoints Jesus, he celebrates the boldness and courageousness of her love. Wherever he goes, Jesus rejoices in the gifts of the people and places that he encounters.

Jesus offers a robust, ethical vision of mobile life. He builds community and forges networks of support. He pays careful attention to his environment, even noticing the significance of dust and dirt. He surprises us, pointing out the good things in others that we may have overlooked.

I am struck by the gap between Jesus' response and my own. While navigating New York City as a new resident, I have not always appreciated my surroundings. I am frazzled and occasionally grumpy rather than open and attentive. Sometimes, on the subway during rush hour, I feel much more like an unredeemed Ebenezer Scrooge than a disciple of Christ.

Nevertheless, every once in a while I let the Spirit move. As I walked through Midtown the other day, I was struck by the beauty of the people coming toward me:

a spectrum of skin tones, hair both free and delicately coiffed, a range of attire inflected by personal style. Moments like these, moments of letting oneself be bowled over by the beauty that comes toward us, seem like first steps toward Jesus' vision of the mobile life.