Traveling Light week One

The Lord is my shepherd  Psalm 23

This message was presented by Lisa Crone Sheldon at Saint Paul’s UMC on 6/3/12

Weary travelers.  You’ve seen them – everything they own crammed into their luggage.  Staggering through terminals and hotel lobbies with overstuffed suitcases, trunks, duffels, and backpacks.


We’ve all seen people like that.

At times we are people like that – if not without our physical luggage, then at least with our spiritual load.

Odds are, we brought some luggage to church.  Somewhere between the first step on the floor and the last step out the door, we grabbed some luggage.  Don’t you remember doing so?  That’s because you did it without thinking.

(Pick up the props as you speak)  The suitcase of guilt.  A sack of discontent.  We drape a duffel bag of weariness on one shoulder and a hanging bag of grief on the other.  Add on a backpack of doubt, an overnight bag of loneliness, and a trunk of fear.  Pretty soon we are pulling more stuff than a skycap.  No wonder we are so tired at the end of the day.  Lugging all this luggage is exhausting.

God is saying to us, “Set that stuff down!  You are carrying burdens you don’t need to bear.”  (Lucado pg. 5)

Jesus says, “Come to me all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”  (Matthew 11:28)

God will lighten our load if we will let Him.  The Twenty Third Psalm is going to show us over the month of Sundays in June how to let God lighten our load.  The study book that we are using as a companion to this sermon series is, “Traveling Light,” by Max Lucado.
The burden that we are setting down today is a big bag full of self reliance.

Since we were children we have said to our parents, “No, I’ll do it myself.” It was one of our earliest declarations of independence. Now, it becomes an obstacle to us as we refuse to let God help us release some of the burdens that we were never intended to bear.

I am not the only one who has made a personal anthem based on the Frank Sinatra hit song, “I did it my way!”

Do we really want to rely just on ourselves and try to muddle though this life without God’s help? Max Lucado showed us what the Twenty Third Psalm would look like if we rely on ourselves instead of relying on God. (read from Lucado page 25) How do we set down the luggage, the burden of self reliance, and let God help us carry the load of life?

The answer to that question might be simpler than you think. We must put our confidence in God. (FROG, fully rely on God). The Lord is my shepherd. If God is for us, who can be against us? I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. The Lord is my shepherd. Isn’t that better than trying to do things all by myself?

Let me tell you a short story. A woman decided she wanted to travel overseas. She went to get her passport and they made her raise her right hand and take an oath. “Do you promise to defend your country against all enemies both foreign and domestic?” She looked up in dismay and said, “All by myself?” So often that is our first assumption that we are supposed to do everything by ourselves.

Have you ever noticed how some people go through life full of confidence and vigor, no matter what happens to them? When disaster strikes, they survive. When obstacles are placed in their path, they persevere. In the tumult of life's arena they are knocked down but never out, and they always have the internal fortitude to get up and get going again.

Have you ever noticed how such people are at their best when things are at their worst? They have an attitude about them which overcomes adversity. They have an
inner strength to help them defeat the trials and traumas which come their way. Wouldn’t it be nice if we could be like that? The good news is that we can, if we rely on God to be our shepherd.

We all need the confidence not to quit, at every stage of our lives, if we are to live up to the potential God gives us. Confidence is needed by the child who enters Kindergarten for the first time. Confidence is needed by the young adult who leaves home to begin their education and career. Confidence is needed in our middle years as we navigate through the complexities of our work life. Confidence is needed in our last years of life as we face our own mortality.

Look at the familiar words of the twenty-third Psalm. Here is a psalm of utter, unshakable confidence which doesn't depend on his self esteem or his own ability and strength. The whole psalm is about God and that's why the Psalmist feels so confident about his life. You see, it’s not about you and it’s not about me. It’s about God and what God can do through you and me. We don’t have to do this alone. That is great news!

Think about the attributes of God and see if this doesn’t increase your confidence: God –our Shepherd- doesn’t check the weather; he makes it. He doesn’t defy gravity; he created it. He isn’t affected by health; he has no body. Jesus said, said in John 4:24 that God is spirit. Since God has no body then there are no limitations to where God can be. God is equally active in Ponca City as He is in Jerusalem. “Where can I go to get away from your Spirit?” asked David. “Where can I run from you? If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I lie down in the grave, you are there.” (Ps. 139: 7-8). Don’t we need this kind of shepherd?

The world is always in motion. Everything is changing. Isn’t it comforting to know that God remains constant in the midst of all the changes? Max Lucado tells the story of the famous novelist, Lloyd Douglas, who lived in a. boarding house while he attended college. A retired, wheelchair bound music professor resided on the first floor. Each morning Douglas would stick his head in the door of the teacher’s apartment and ask the same question, “Well, what’s the good news?” The old man would pick up his tuning fork, tap it on the side of the wheel chair, and say, “That’s middle C! It was middle C yesterday; it will be middle C
tomorrow; it will be middle C a thousand years from now. The tenor upstairs sings flat. The piano across the hall is out of tune, but my friend, that is middle C.”

Friends, we need something as true and stable in our lives as middle C; something that does not change like true north. Relationships change, health changes, the weather changes (especially on Oklahoma – wait 5 minutes Will Rogers used to say)…but God who ruled the earth last night is the same God who rules the earth today. God has the same values, the same convictions, the same plan, the same love. God never changes. God is our middle C. God is a still point in a world that is constantly turning. Don’t we need a still point? Don’t we need an unchanging shepherd? God is stable when everything else seems to be flying out of control.

Do you ever struggle with doubt? We will talk about that later in this series. But let me close with a brief thought about that. Last Friday, when I wrote this sermon, I started the day with a devotional based on John 15:26 and 27. Jesus promised that the Spirit of God would live in the heart of every Christian. In this passage, the Spirit of God is referred to as the Counselor. When the counselor comes…the spirit of truth sent from God the Father, he will bear witness to Jesus as the Son of God, our savior. I thought about this question as I wrote in my journal: How do I connect myself with the spirit of God?

I sat there in the silence of my living room for quite awhile and then a still small voice in the form of a mental thought came my way, I can’t experience the Holy Spirit when I am caught up in the distracting thoughts, the plans, the worries, the to do lists, a friend of mine said all those things can be like box cars of a train rushing by clicking and clacking and making so much noise. The voice of the Holy Spirit is a still, small whisper. In order to embrace the stillness in a world that is constantly turning, I must find a place of quietness within myself.

Set the burden of self reliance down. Let go and let God. Find a place of quietness within yourself and don’t be surprised to find that God is already there. Be still and know God. The Lord, is my shepherd. Amen.