

Reflection on 6 September 2026

By Forbes Mutch, Lay Leader of Worship

What's in our baggage?

You may have experienced this situation at some point this summer.

There are two suitcases on the bed, both open; they each belong to different people. One suitcase will take 20-30 minutes to pack for a two-week vacation, the owner knows from previous experience what needs to be taken – they've looked at the weather forecast for the destination; packed a couple of pairs of shorts, two T-shirts and a long-sleeved shirt for decorum if they end up going to a posh restaurant. Done! Maybe throw in one pair of spare trainers.

The other person will block out three days on the kitchen calendar saying 'pack for holiday'.

They will start by packing the essentials. Then they'll add another jumper, just in case. Another pair of shoes, just in case. Another pair of shoes, just in case! A book that probably won't be read and a detailed guidebook. And a foreign language phrase book, just in case. And various other things which, at the time, seem absolutely necessary.

And then the bag gets dragged along the landing and put it on the bathroom scales: 'Oh my goodness, why is this bag 32kg heavy... this is ridiculous. Can I put some of this stuff in your bag?'

The trouble with taking too much on a journey is that eventually you have to carry it, even if it's just across the landing to the bathroom.

And I wonder if life can be a little like that.

We collect things as we go along. Not just possessions, but worries, disappointments, grudges, ambitions, opinions about other people. We carry some of these things for so long that we hardly notice the weight anymore, but they drag us down, they hold us back.

In today's Gospel, there's a crowd travelling with Jesus. And Jesus turns to them and says some surprisingly tough things.

He tells them that following him comes at a cost. He talks about carrying the cross and giving up stuff. Then he gives two very down-to-earth examples.

If you're going to build a tower, he says, you'd better work out whether you can afford to finish it. And if a king is considering going to war, he'd better think carefully about what he's getting himself into.

In other words: *don't begin the journey without thinking about what it takes, what it really takes. If you're going to follow me, simplify the baggage.*

Jesus doesn't want a crowd of people who think he's rather wonderful. He wants disciples. And there is a difference. Because it's quite possible to admire Jesus without actually allowing his spirit to change us.

We can admire his teaching about forgiveness, while thinking: *Yes, Lord, I agree, absolutely. Although obviously you don't know exactly what she said to me on that occasion five years ago, how can I forgive that?*

We can agree that we should love our neighbour – while quietly hoping Jesus doesn't mean *that neighbour, on THAT side, because they never cut their hedge.*

And that's where our reading from Philemon becomes so interesting. Paul writes to Philemon about Onesimus. Whatever has happened between them, Paul asks Philemon to welcome Onesimus back – but differently.

Receive him, Paul says, as *a beloved brother*. Because of Jesus, the relationship has to change.

And perhaps that is where discipleship has to become real for us too.

Discipleship is not necessarily some enormous, heroic act of faith – I will follow you! But tomorrow morning: it's going to be in the way we speak to someone, in the apology we know we ought to make, in being generous when nobody notices, in giving somebody another chance, in deciding that a resentment we have carried for years is quite heavy enough, forget it.

There are plenty of things we carry through life that Jesus never asks us to carry.

Bitterness. Pride. The need to have the last word. The need always to be right. Old judgments about people. Believing the gossip.

And perhaps Jesus is saying: *You can put some of that down.*

Following Jesus certainly has a cost. Forgiveness costs something. Generosity costs something. Loving difficult people costs something.

We know that, but perhaps there is another question. What is the cost of not following Jesus?

What does bitterness cost if we carry it for twenty years? What does constantly wanting more do to us? What happens when being right becomes more important than being kind? When we decide to become a disciple of Jesus, Christ invites us on a journey, step by step.

We don't need to ask, *How can I become a perfect disciple?* None of us can.

Perhaps the better question is simply: *What am I carrying that makes it harder for me to be a disciple and follow Jesus?* What am I putting in the suitcase of life that I don't really need; what is it that I am carrying that should really be left on the bed?

And then perhaps our prayer can be *Lord, show me what I need to put down. Show me what needs to change. And give me the courage to follow you in the way that you want, free of the baggage that I think is important but you know I can do without.*

Thank you.

Amen.