

As I write this article, we are coming to the end of August 2026. Traditionally, a month of rest, renewal and recreation. For those able to afford it, there might have been a holiday, at home or overseas; time beside the sea, a river or mountains. Perhaps time trying to avoid the baking heat that has lasted many weeks. Maybe a city break, in Britain or further afield.

If we have travelled, we will have needed to pack. At the moment, I am trying to sort out the gear required for our annual trip to the Greenbelt festival. That means gathering everything from mugs and packet food to hauling the tent, camping beds, sleeping bags, stove, fuel and kettle, crockery, table and chairs out of the under-stairs cupboard.

And there will be clothes required – covering all eventualities, even with the heatwave, now that the weather forecasters are talking about thundery showers. Living out in a field for several days, even in August, means it can turn cold in the evenings, too.

So, no chance of packing light. I always admire my festival siblings who make it there by train or coach, carrying all they need on their backs and one or two additional bags.

When Jesus sent his twelve disciples on a mission journey, in the Gospel of Matthew, he gave them directions on where to go and amongst whom he was sending them ('apostle' meaning 'one who is sent'). He also told them: 'Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for labourers deserve their food.'

You can only really pack that light if you are travelling together, in partnership or community. You can only do so also if you are journeying in the hopeful expectation of making friends on the way. The apostles surely will need someone to offer them a cup of water, perhaps a clean shirt, or a place to rest their weary heads.

The apostles need to be stepping out in trust, able to rely on one another and on the strangers they will encounter on the way. If they pack absolutely everything they might possibly need, they won't need one another or need to make new friends.

In the Lord's wisdom, there is a sense of freedom, even joy, to be found in packing light, trusting that the community you will encounter will help meet your needs. Each traveller can offer at least a small bit of what they have received from God, the giver of all good gifts. And they also learn to receive, with true gratitude, what a fellow traveller may offer them. When fellow pilgrims enter this situation, one of giving and receiving, then love can be discovered in the exchange. The possibility of seeing one another's need, recognising our common humanity, as people each made in the image of God, and seeking to meet need, as little as we may think we have to offer. Even that little could be life-changing to someone, who feels seen, known and valued. Friendships are made, community found, lives sustained.

To pack and travel lighter, to make room for community, we need to believe that our needs will be met by God's abundance. Too often we think – or are encouraged to think – in terms of scarcity, particularly in a church struggling with lack of finance and a lack of volunteers.

I *will* try to travel as light as possible to Greenbelt. Thank the Lord I have no need of hair-straighteners - or even a comb.

And being among the community that is created there every year, one including people of faith (and of none), sharing a desire to change the world for the better, to learn and show the power of love, mercy and justice, perhaps to dance with one another, including strangers, under the stars, it becomes a special space of being and sharing.

It will, at the same time, involve some deep reflection and a willingness to be open to others' stories that can often be hard to hear – whether from people caught up in the violence of Gaza and the West Bank, of Ukraine, or places of climate change devastation. This year at Greenbelt there will be a stream about the threatening rise of so-called 'Christian' nationalism, and ideas on how to counter it, peacefully, in an informed way and in the light of Jesus' teaching on care for the stranger, the poor, the hungry, the imprisoned.

One year, when I was planning to head off to Greenbelt, I was encouraged, well-meaningly I'm sure, by someone to 'enjoy your break', as if it was some kind of jolly. In the fields, there are usually challenging issues to learn about. But because we will do so together, with fellow pilgrims of goodwill and creativity, each year we go with the confidence that we will discover how the love of God in Jesus Christ can make a difference.

And perhaps we learn how to travel that bit lighter into the future, renewed in faith and hope, and ready to give and receive more readily.

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