Long ago, those going on a journey to unknown places depended on experienced local guides, hired along the way. Ancient sailors learned to navigate the seas, plotting their course by the stars. Eventually explorers devised the compass, and recorded their collective knowledge on maps for others to follow. Today, the modern traveler can rely on satellite controlled GPS systems installed in our watches, navigation devices installed in our cars, and a host of internet apps installed on our smart phones, such as AAA’s Triptik, to map out the road ahead, locate restaurants and gas stations, predict the weather, and pre-purchase our accommodations for the following night. Long gone are the days of anxious and weary pilgrims, facing danger and uncertainty at every turn. We may find the instructions of Jesus to his disciples, found in today’s Gospel, to be a bit unfamiliar to our ears and sensibilities. Midway through the earthly ministry of our Lord, he decided to give his followers an opportunity to put into practice what they had seen in his actions. It was an internship, of sorts. Like a wise
parent bird, this assignment was an essential early step of kicking the young fledging disciples out of the nest, so they could learn to fly. And so in this passage of Holy Scripture, we hear those instructions from Jesus to his disciples, just as they are about to embark on their first solo flight. These instructions are still entirely relevant for today’s disciples too, since we still continue the work of the Kingdom of God that Jesus began. Let’s listen and learn, along with those first followers of Jesus twenty-one centuries ago . . .

1. There are no Lone Rangers—learn to work within community and partnership. At a wedding recently, a bride shocked me by saying that her favorite song was “I did it my way! (There went my notion of being a couple!) The first thing Jesus did with his band of followers was to place them in pairings of two. Why was this? Had we been in charge of this mission, we might have decided that 72 independent disciples could cover more ground, and make a bigger impact, than 36 teamed pairs of disciples. But Jesus knew better. He knew that when we learn to work with others, sharing the load,
encouraging each other, and watching out for each other, we are more likely to finish the mission, to stay safe, and to avoid taking too much individual credit—or blame—for the outcome of the work. Like two farm animals yoked together in the field, teams of people can more than double their production, and keep from wearing out along the way. And besides, even the Lone Ranger worked with his trusted friend and companion, Tonto.

2. Even though there are wolves in the world, place your **ultimate trust in the shepherd.** Jesus gave his followers a chilling analogy before sending them off on the mission. He likened them to “lambs in the midst of wolves.” Sheep have no greater enemy than wolves, and wolves have no more favorite target than sheep. Sheep have no natural defenses—they cannot fly, climb trees, swim, or run fast. Sheep do not have menacing teeth or dangerous claws. They do not work together in packs. The poor lambs do not appear to have a prayer of a chance against wolves. No wonder wolves loved to pick on sheep! But the lambs do have one advantage over the wolves. Sheep
have a shepherd. And that is their only defense. It is the wolves, by the way, who do not have a prayer of chance against a good shepherd. So thankfully, lambs do have a prayer after all. It is all they have. But...it is enough.

3. Resist the temptation to be self-sufficient, since there is no such thing anyway. Jesus knew that his disciple “lambs” would always be tempted to take their protection and provision into their own hands. It is our nature as humans. We do not like being sheep. We would prefer being wolves. So to drive home the point, Jesus instructed the disciples not to take extra sandals, extra money, or seek to develop protective human alliances along the way. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with having a savings account, making a retirement plan, having an extra pair of shoes, or making friends and networking. But we start down a perilous path when we place our ultimate trust in these self-provisions. Sure, life is risky, and no less so for those who follow Christ. But beware crawling into the premature tomb of our own
bunker, built out of our own insecurity, and our longing to be self-sufficient and self-reliant.

4. Exchange the gifts of ministry and hospitality graciously.

Though there is evil in the world, there is also much good. Most people are still essentially kind, have the same needs and desires, and want to do the right and noble thing. When we risk opening ourselves up to the stranger, we may find that they are not so different than we are after all. And more, we discover that their hospitality is a beautiful gift to us, even as our proclamation of the Gospel is to them. Jesus urged us to exchange these good gifts of host and guest, with mutual respect and gratitude. Once again, none of us got to where we are on our own. Anyone with a belly button should know this. There are no self-made people. Mothers, fathers, friends, coaches, teachers, mentors, writers, priests—so many fingerprints have shaped the clay of our lives. Let’s remain open, humble, and generous.
5. Learn to be content and grateful. Notice the sage counsel of Jesus for disciples to resist the temptation to “move up the ladder” from one host to another, always looking for finer accommodations, a nicer appointment, a more plush setting. This longing is born of discontent and envy, and cannot be satisfied. There is no contentment to be found somewhere else, with someone else, or doing something else. Contentment is within, found in Christ alone.

6. Not everyone will welcome you or your message, but that does not change the message. Our job is to bear witness, not to convince the jury. The response of the hearer can and will vary, but notice that whether received or rejected, Jesus told us to say the exact same thing, “the Kingdom of God is at hand.” Even wiping off the sandals is not necessarily calling down a curse on those who refuse the message. Maybe it is just a way of saying that when you are rejected at one place, wipe it off, brush it off, and move on fresh to the next place without dragging the previous negative emotions with you. Good
counsel for sales people, would-be authors with a handful of rejection notices, and failed relationships of all kinds, don’t you think?

7. The true joy of the journey is not defined by results, but by communion with the Good Shepherd. At the end of any true adventure, it was not so much the sights and experiences along the way, but the company of those with whom we travel, and the arms that welcome us to our true home, that brings us the greatest joy. Even so, Jesus counsels us to celebrate the victories of the Kingdom, but not too much. The greatest celebration is that we got to be part of the Kingdom adventure at all, that we belong to the One who calls each of His lambs by name.