

Pentecost 5 (proper 8) 6-27-10

AS THE LORD LIVES, I WILL NOT LEAVE YOU....

In the name of the Living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Man alive, I can never get over how appropriate Sunday lessons can be to our life experience, from time to time!

Sometimes they just may fly over our heads, but at other times they just nail you right where you're living!

Today's lessons are all about answering God's call, no matter how demanding such discipleship may be.

First of all: Elijah and Elisha, passing on the mantle of leadership. (This is when the organist should break into *Chariots of Fire* just for the emotional effect and connect that marvelous movie image to its Biblical root!)

Elijah is caught up in the whirlwind, and Elisha receives that mantle of leadership having vowed never to leave him. Jesus setting his face to Jerusalem teaches his disciples just what **faces them** if they truly want to follow. This is not an easy path, yet the witness has been that **it has been worth it**, given the **reality of grace** that gets us through, that truly amazing grace that will not let us down when we most need it.

What better context could we have than such lessons to help us—you and me both—look at, and experience, the changes in front of us as a parish and as individuals as we struggle to answer God's call no matter how tough it may be.

Thanks be to God for the messages we get from the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone, as the Collect for today prays.

We will sing at 10 (or have just sung) the opening hymn and gradual that begins to paint the story and the message of this sermon:

**God of the prophets: bless the prophets' heirs!
Elijah's mantel o'er Elisha cast:
each age for thine own solemn task prepares,
make each one stronger, nobler than the last.**

**Anoint (us) prophets, priests, apostles,
Heralds of thy cross;
Forth may (we) go to tell all realms thy grace:
Inspired of thee, may we count all but loss,
and stand at last with joy before thy face.**

Is there not a message for you in those verses? I know there is for me. I'm called to be "out there," and so are you, walking the walk, not just talking the talk; inspired in spite of the cost, because I know the JOY in little glimpses, where you find yourself saying: "**I just don't get it!** Despite everything, the cost, the insecurities, the ambiguities, the difficulties and tragedies of this life, STILL you bring us JOY, O Lord; you bring us LOVE, the kind that just won't let us go." So when we hear the prophet Elisha saying to Elijah, "I will never leave you," as so many things change and challenge us, **you get the message**, that's how God feels about YOU, and ME, and all of us together!!

And then the Gradual inspires us royally: "***BE NOT AFRAID, I go before you always—Come, follow me, and I will give you rest!***"

Well, I will attest after 41 plus years of being a parish priest, you don't always get the rest part without really good boundaries, a few sabbaticals, and then maybe rest at the last, we shall see!!

I'm just reading Barbara Brown Taylor's book ***Leaving Church***, about her struggles of being a parish priest 24/7 and getting burned out. She wondered at one point why she was straight out on her back for a whole week in spasm!! Wow, talk about hitting home!!

She laments her experience in the church, when we get so preoccupied by the non-essentials, all the things that seem to separate us from God, and diminutize the real message and mission of God in Christ, to bring about the reconciliation of the whole world to the mystery and wonder of God's love for all people. That happens in all the details of our lives if we live them out the way Paul is telling the people in Galatians: Live by the Spirit; don't sacrifice your freedom in Christ with low life.

Listen to how Eugene Peterson paraphrases this classic listing of the sins of the flesh compared to the fruits of the spirit:

My counsel is THIS: Live freely, animated and motivated by God's Spirit. Then you won't feed the compulsions of selfishness. For there is a root of sinful self-interest in us that is at odds with a free spirit, just as the free spirit is incompatible with selfishness. (These two ways are antithetical & we often hang between them, don't we?)

It's obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness, cutthroat competition; all-consuming yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits, the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. I could go on! (You won't inherit the kingdom like that!! This is Paul to the Galatians, and to you and me!!)

So, what if we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. **We develop a willingness to stick with things**, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that **a basic holiness permeates things and people**. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely....

Since this is the kind of life we've chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us **make sure** that we do not just hold it as an **idea in our heads** or a **sentiment in our hearts**, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives. That means we will **not compare ourselves with each other** as if one of us were better and another worse. We have **far more** interesting things to do with our lives. **Each of us is an original!!**

I don't know about you, but that stuff really lights my fire! **This is the kind of life** we are called to live in the Spirit, and by God's grace, trusting that he will never leave us, just like Elisha will never leave Elijah, 'til the mantle of leadership is passed and the new era is upon us.

May that promise sustain us in the changes and chances of our lives, in our parish life at the moment in this summer of impending transition, but also in **your own personal life**, no matter the challenges before you, may you hear God's call, **and answer**, even now, standing to say, we believe...

