

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 26, 2022

Hold steady the plow.
Dig furrows of commitment.
Listen to the earth.
-rvb

Reading I

1 Kgs 19:16b, 19-21

The LORD said to Elijah:
“You shall anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah,
as prophet to succeed you.”

Elijah set out and came upon Elisha, son of Shaphat,
as he was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen;
he was following the twelfth.

Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak over him.

Elisha left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said,
“Please, let me kiss my father and mother goodbye,
and I will follow you.”

Elijah answered, “Go back!
Have I done anything to you?”

Elisha left him, and taking the yoke of oxen, slaughtered them;
he used the plowing equipment for fuel to boil their flesh,
and gave it to his people to eat.

Then Elisha left and followed Elijah as his attendant.

A reflection, exegesis, and commentary on the scriptures. In this reading from 1 Kings, the narrative highlights a call and the acceptance of the challenge to be a prophet, one who speaks the truth in the name of God. Similarly, in the Gospel Jesus says, “Follow me,” as some

individuals did say, "I will follow you Lord." This is the classic "Call and Response" as found so often in the Gospels. Elijah, the prophet carries out his mandate by finding Elisha, a young farmer of means, and bestowing on him the prophetic mantle, thought to be imbued with great power. Elisha recognizes the meaning and depth of his call to service, and asks for permission to leave his parents.

There is no doubt that Elisha has put his hand to the plow daily as he listened in silence to the earth which was preparing him for his prophetic call, teaching him the qualities necessary to be a prophet, and he prayed in response: "Earth teach me **stillness** as the grasses are stilled with light. Earth teach me **suffering** as old stones suffer with memory. Earth teach me **humility** as blossoms are humble with beginning. Earth teach me **caring** as the mother secures her young. Earth teach me **courage** as the tree stands tall. Earth teach me **limitation** as the ant crawls on the ground. Earth teach me **freedom** as the eagle which soars in the sky. Earth teach me **resignation** as the leaves which die in the fall. Earth teach me **regeneration** as the seed which rises in the spring. Earth teach me **to forget myself** as melted snow forgets its

life. Earth teach me to remember kindness as dry fields sweep with rain.” – Nancy Wood

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11

R (cf. 5a) You are my inheritance, O Lord.

Keep me, O God, for in you I take refuge;

I say to the LORD, “My Lord are you.

O LORD, my allotted portion and my cup,
you it is who hold fast my lot.”

R You are my inheritance, O Lord.

I bless the LORD who counsels me;

even in the night my heart exhorts me.

I set the LORD ever before me;

with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed.

R You are my inheritance, O Lord.

Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices,
my body, too, abides in confidence

because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld,
nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption.

R You are my inheritance, O Lord.

You will show me the path to life,

fullness of joys in your presence,

the delights at your right hand forever.

R You are my inheritance, O Lord.

Reading II

Gal 5:1, 13-18

Brothers and sisters:

For freedom Christ set us free;

so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.

For you were called for freedom, brothers and sisters.

But do not use this freedom
as an opportunity for the flesh;
rather, serve one another through love.
For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement,
namely, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*
But if you go on biting and devouring one another,
beware that you are not consumed by one another.

I say, then: **live by the Spirit**
and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh.
For the flesh has desires against the Spirit,
and the Spirit against the flesh;
these are opposed to each other,
so that you may not do what you want.
But if you are guided by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

A reflection, exegesis, and commentary on the scripture readings. In
this reading from Galatians, Paul emphasizes that salvation comes
through faith more than following the Mosaic Law. It is a gift of God. We
are free in Christ, free to love as captured by the words of St. Augustine,
“Love and do what you will.” Laws are necessary, but their observance
should always be guided and motivated by love. Just as love is the
proper content and context of freedom, thus the Holy Spirit is its proper
context and dynamic force by which love is empowered and guided. We
are to follow the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law, for
the spirit does give life while the letter can kill our desire to be free and

to love for the sake of the greater good, and the good will of all human beings and creatures of the sky, earth, and water. Here is a situation of the ethical principle of the spirit of the law as opposed to the letter of the law.

When his facility burnt down in 1995, Aaron Feuerstein, the owner of [Malden Mills](#), a textile mill in New England faced several ethical choices. He was under no legal obligation to pay his employees. However, the businessman was more interested in the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law. At 70 years old, Aaron decided to use the insurance money to rebuild the mill instead of retiring. In doing so, he upheld the ethical principle of workplace preservation. This principle holds that employers are obligated to do everything they can to keep their businesses operating and profitable so they can provide continued employment and build community prosperity. While the family business was being re-built, Aaron decided to keep all 3,000 workers on the payroll and pay them for three months. Additionally, Aaron chose to stay in business in the same location, while his competitors were contracting work overseas for cheaper wages. Aaron Feuerstein often quoted the scriptures, which cited that the purpose of a

business goes beyond simply making a profit, but to serve his workers and the community-at-large. "I felt the responsibility for all my employees, to take care of them and provide jobs," he said. "I think I made a wise business decision by reopening the factory but that's not why I did it. I did it because it was the right thing to do." Quoting the sages from scripture, Aaron said, "When all is in moral chaos, this is the time for you to be an honorable, ethical, and respectable person concerned about the well-being of others."

The strength of the Aaron's spiritual alignment with God's Spirit is in direct correlation to what the Christian chooses to focus on. A focus on God's Word will cause a person to see from His perspective and react in ways that please God. A focus on popular culture, worldly philosophy, and conventional wisdom will inevitably cause one to take the perspective of "the flesh"(in this situation greed and profit), and will subtly or not so subtly warp his or her judgment. Living in the world, we are constantly bombarded with the values and desires of the flesh. Unless we take steps to counteract those messages, we will find ourselves out of step with the Spirit of God who lives within us.

Alleluia

1 Sm 3:9; Jn 6:68c

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Speak, Lord, your servant is listening;
you have the words of everlasting life.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Lk 9:51-62

When the days for Jesus' being taken up were fulfilled,
he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem,
and he sent messengers ahead of him.

On the way they entered a Samaritan village
to prepare for his reception there,
but they would not welcome him

because the destination of his journey was Jerusalem.

When the disciples James and John saw this they asked,
"Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven
to consume them?"

Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they journeyed to another village.

As they were proceeding on their journey someone said to him,
"I will follow you wherever you go."

Jesus answered him,

"Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests,
but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head."

And to another he said, "Follow me."

But he replied, "Lord, let me go first and bury my father."

But he answered him, "Let the dead bury their dead.

But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

And another said, "I will follow you, Lord,

but first let me say farewell to my family at home."

To him Jesus said, "No one who sets a hand to the plow
and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God."

A reflection, exegesis, and commentary on the scriptures. In the Gospel reading from Luke, we are to gauge and measure the depth and breadth of our commitment to Jesus, and to follow Him resolutely. Jesus' mission is not like Elijah's; his intent is to undergo suffering, not to cause it. Just as Jesus was rejected at the beginning of his ministry by the Nazarenes, so he is rejected at the beginning of his journey to Jerusalem by Samaritans. The hand to the plow indicates that the demand of the kingdom is absolute; no other duty can detract from following Jesus.

Christianity is a blend of "cheap" and "costly" grace. **In the Cost of Discipleship**, Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes in unsettling terms what it means to be a follower of Jesus. "Cheap" grace is knowing the message of Jesus without doing anything about it. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, without the cross, without Jesus living and incarnate. "Costly" grace is costly because it demands the person's life. It challenges us to live the Gospels, to pray and to step out of the circle of the silent majority to live as Jesus did, that is, as the life of a radical Jew. It is costly because today's disciple must ask, "How do I follow Jesus in a world that does not necessarily embrace the values of the Gospels? Chesterton said, Christianity has not failed, for it has never been tried."

As a radical Jew, Jesus is not afraid to confront the establishment and to demand a decision: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you frauds” (Matthew 23.23); “This is the time of fulfillment...Reform your lives and believe in the Gospel” (Mark 1.15ff); “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16.24). Mark’s Jesus feels a sense of urgency as he marches to Jerusalem. He confronts the leaders in the marketplace. The leaders are slaves of convention, custom, tradition, titles, and drunk with power. Jesus has a showdown in the temple. Prayer is pushed aside for the sake of profit. The leaders “prey” on others, rather than “pray” for others. The holy sanctuary fades into the darkness of greed, power, and prestige.

Jesus has a showdown with himself. He wonders, “Am I the one, am I ready to face the consequences of my words and beliefs? Jesus is a prophet who is overflowing with the torrents of “costly” grace. He holds tight and keep his eyes on the plow. He demands decision, sacrifice, action, and rejection. He accepts no less than our lives being turned around, inside out, and our priorities reversed.

Like Jesus, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, a Russian writer who confronted the then leaders of Russia were seized by the power of “costly” grace when he challenged the leaders of oppression, and Harvard graduates years later in

1983 commencement address to return to God: “The entire twentieth century is being sucked into the vortex of atheism and self-destruction. We can only reach with determination for the warm hand of God, which we have so rashly and self-confidently pushed away...There is nothing else to cling to in the landslide” (Time, May 23, 1983, p. 57).

Jesus’ words rattle our souls. He says “no” to life the way it is, and “yes” to something of greater meaning. He says “no” to a world based on power, prestige, and position – the three great temptations of Jesus. He says “no” to a lengthy list of ills that confront us, and “yes” to the kingdom of love as embraced by our discipleship. Love is the only force that can call forth the full spiritual power of costly grace within us. We cannot commit the sin of looking the other way and settling down in our comfortable pews. Would that the politicians in Washington, D.C. take a more comprehensive legislation against gun violence. As the earth spoke to Elisha while he was plowing, let us commit ourselves as caretakers, stewards, and prophets for and of the earth, and the well-being of our fellow human beings. “The expansion of human power has hardly begun, and what we are going to do with our power may either save or destroy our planet...In our own age we have been forced into the realization that there will be either one world or no world.” – Abraham Joshua Heschel.

Roger J. Vanden Busch