Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“I will follow you wherever you go” (Luke 9:55).

Thirteenth Sunday of the Year

1 Kgs 19:16b, 19-21; Ps 16; Gal 5:1, 13-18; Lk 9:51-62

The readings for this Sunday display an intensity and urgency associated with vocation that few of us could claim. Elisha is recruited by the prophet Elijah with the touch of his cloak and the expectation that he drop everything to follow him. Jesus meets a series of aspiring disciples who are shocked by the immediacy and totality of his call. There is no time to say goodbye. Don’t look back from the plow.

Such scriptural images contrast sharply with our attempts to live our Christian lives with incremental steps or a way to better express our faith within our contemporary circumstances. The ideal is always there, but ordinary opportunities to live heroically are rare or rarely pursued.

One factor is that in Jesus’ time life expectancy was around 35 years, so shorter lives focused people’s energy as they pursued complete their sense of mission. If Jesus was only 30-something when he died on the cross, and if most of his disciples were likely in their 20s or 30s, this explains the compression they applied to their decisions. What would the Gospel look like if they had all lived into their 60s and 70s?

Biblical story telling is not without hyperbole. Elisha’s decision to slaughter a yoke of oxen and burn his plows illustrates his commitment to follow Elijah. The same radical choice is found in the story of the sons of Zebedee walking away from their father, their future and their nets and boats at the beckoning of Jesus.

At the same time these stories emphasize the mysterious ways of God in sending history in a different trajectory with a sudden gesture. Elijah throws his cloak over Elisha to select him. In the genealogy of Jesus, the Jewish Boaz puts his cloak over the Moabite woman, Ruth, on the threshing floor to make her his wife, the mother of Obed, the grandfather of King David.

The call to follow Jesus and the chance to move within God’s providence should stir us to act when grace touches our lives. The Good News is that grace is touching us constantly in ways great and small. We will find our vocations daily if we listen to the voice of God when it shouts and when it whispers, and even when it echoes in our

failures and in the regret we feel when we know we have missed the chance to respond fully or in a timely way.

The scriptures tout the ideal, but they also teach us with examples of saints who needed Plan B to make the cut. St. Paul had to be knocked to the ground to realize he was going in the wrong direction. St Peter had to fail miserably to learn the meaning of mercy before he was ready to lead the church in proclaiming it.

Whether we respond early or late, live short lives of heroic virtue or long lives of reluctant obedience, God still wants each of us to find our vocation. Jesus encouraged us by assembling a group of bumblers and doubters, zealots and cowards, to accompany him to Jerusalem. He welcomed men and women who never looked back and some who fled at the first sign of trouble. In the end what matters is that they kept trying until they got it right and took their place within God's mysterious call to holiness.

Jesus calls procrastinators and first-timers, quick studies and slow learners. The ideal is the lamp at our feet whether we run or walk. This is the joy of the Gospel.

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