

Pentcost 3, Year C - June 30th, 2019

Readings: 1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21; Psalm 16; Luke 9:51-62

In the name of God...

What did you want to be when you grew up? At various points in my childhood I wanted to be a firefighter, the second basemen for the Cubs, an astronaut, and a linebacker for the Bears. In high school I wanted to be a historian, and then a pastor.

How many of you are doing (or did) what you wanted to do at 8? Or 12? Or even 20? We spend time worrying about what's ahead, and whether we are doing the right thing with our lives. Circumstances and experiences change our perspective on who we are and what want to do. Or what we are called to do.

I know that as an adult I have spent more time thinking about it than the average person. But society often defines us by our job or what we do. I have counseled those who have lost their jobs, cannot find more work in their fields, and heard how confused, frustrated, embarrassed, and sometimes dehumanized they feel.

"You will show me the path of life" is how the Psalmist describes the way they want to live. Its trust in God that leads to the blessings in life. The Lord gives counsel and teaches. The Lord protects and provides. In this Psalm everything flows from our relationship with God and our relationship with his people.

Elijah is sent to annoint new kings in Syria and Israel. Jehu, who was to be anointed the new king of Israek, was a commander in the army, and the grandson of a king. He grew up in that setting, as a kid he probably daydreamed of being the king. And I am sure at some point reality set in, as does for many of us, instead it was his cousins that reigned. Elijah was now going to annonit Jehu a king. But that's a story for a different time.

Before that Elijah had to call his replacement. Did Elisha dream of being a prophet as a child? Did he dream of being a farmer? We don't know. His calling is unique - Elijah comes up while he is plowing the fields and puts his cloak on him, and continues on his way. No speech. No other acknowledgement. Just places his mantle on a farmer. Elisha's response is interesting.

Think about some other moments of calling in the Bible. The Lord appears, and Sarah laughs. An angel appears, and Jacob wrestles. Gideon is called by the angel of the Lord, and promptly sets tests to make sure he has the right Gideon. Jonah is called, and jumps on a boat headed as far away as he can get in the opposite direction. Paul/Saul required the voice of Jesus and a bit of blindness. Elisha has a mantle thrown on him with no comment as to why, tells Elijah he is going to say goodbye to his parents, and ends up having a party.

Jesus alludes to Elisha in today's Gospel. "Another said, I will follow you Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home. Jesus said to him - No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." The context are those who offer to follow Jesus. Over the last few verses the 5,000 were fed, the disciples acknowledge Jesus as Messiah, Elijah makes an appearance at the Transfiguration, and Jesus starts warning his disciples of his impending death.

But Luke 9 begins with Jesus sending out the 12 Apostles, and the beginning of the next chapter Jesus sends out 70 more. Today's Gospel is rooted in calling and experience. James and John had been sent out according to Luke 9:1 - "power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases". To share God's love and to help people. And their reaction to Jesus not being welcome? They ask if they can call down fire from heaven.

They are called and we are called. Every Christian is called - to share God's love, to be in community, all of the things we affirm in our baptismal vows. Jesus is speaking in hyperbole here. He is encouraging those who want to follow to focus on what they are doing. If you are looking behind you as you plow - your furrows won't be straight.

The disciples were focused on the wrong things - the power and the privilege. Luke is clear that they performed miracles in Jesus name. But they neglected what Jesus "weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness". Our job is to live into the calling we have and to show God's justice, mercy, and faithfulness to the world. Amen.