

## Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Freedom and Commitment

June 30, 2019

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“For freedom Christ set us free” So proclaims Paul in today’s reading from Galatians. But what does freedom mean? At first blush one might think that freedom means being able to do what we want. But we all have lived long enough to know the illusion of that kind of freedom. We have all lived long enough to know that some of our wants enslave rather than liberate us. That some of our wants undermine what we really want.

Paul contrasts desires of the flesh that enslave us with desires of the spirit that liberate us.. Now by desires of the flesh he does not necessarily mean bodily desires, he rather means desires that are of the same nature as the flesh--fleeting, transient, ephemeral, desires that while satisfying the cravings of the moment, ultimately leave us empty and hungrier than ever. My paradigm for such desire are the toys I wanted for Christmas when I was a kid. Toys that looked so cool on TV, but toys which within an hour of opening them, left me bored and disappointed, toys that did not live up to their hype.

The flesh is like grass, here today, gone tomorrow. To live by the spirit is to live for what lasts--the desires of the spirit are those desires that draw us towards what we really want, not necessarily what we want to feel in the moment, or what we want to have at all, but who we want to be. The desires of the spirit are the very voice of God speaking to our hearts, resonating in our souls, calling us forth from our attachment to things towards our love for one another. For as we see with Elijah and Elisha, with Christ and his disciples, God often speaks to us through our encounters with others, through our day to day relationships. And we have all lived long enough to know that true relationships, relationships that liberate, take work, take forgoing at times the desires of the moment.

Elijah and Christ each ask the same thing from those who would enter into a relationship with them, and so with God through them--they both call for a commitment. Elisha wants to follow Elijah, those who approach Jesus want to follow him, but there are other things they feel they need to do first. However Elijah and Jesus are impatient. For they recognize that there will always be something else, more immediate, more urgent at the moment, than the desire of a lifetime, which since it is for a lifetime, we are tempted to think can always be put off for a little while longer. And so while busily absorbed attending to the needs of the moment, we never find the time to attend to the deeper desires of our spirit.

Now in both cases the needs of the moment are family expectations. Why would Elijah and Jesus be calling their disciples away from family in a culture where family is everything? To shock people into getting their priorities straight. To wake them up to what’s at stake. In a traditional culture, meeting family expectations is paramount. Elijah and Jesus are saying that following

God's call ought to take priority over all else, even over family expectations. Today Jesus might talk in terms of walking away from our job. However successful we may be in the eyes of others, what ultimately counts is not what we do but who we are. For who we end up becoming is ultimately determined by what we decide must be done whatever else we may do.

Why be satisfied with what ultimately fails to satisfy? Why wait to live our life? Like Jesus, we too must some day turn our face towards Jerusalem, and follow our calling if we are ever to become ourselves, our true selves, who we were born to be, who God is calling us to be. Are we really too busy today to live our own lives? to be ourselves?

May we live our lives today and everyday. May we hear the voice of God resonate within the deepest longings of our own heart. And may we have the faith and the grace to throw ourselves wholeheartedly into responding to the call by our God to become who we truly are.