

A Permanent Commitment

1 Kings 19:16b, 19-21
Psalm 16
Galatians 5:1, 13-18
Luke 9:51-62

I've heard it said, "A vocation requires a person to be committed, but, then, so does insanity." Commitment is not an easy thing. It requires maturity, persistence, sacrifice, creativity, an awareness of the origin of the vocation, and a sense of purpose. When any of these things are missing, it makes it extremely difficult for us to keep our commitments. For this reason, counselors and organizations talk about our culture being in a "commitment crisis." Some of the motivations that worked in keeping people committed to their vocations forty or fifty years ago, don't work today. The "commitment crisis" is challenging all of us to go deeper spiritually and grow in our maturity, persistence, sacrifice, creativity, awareness, and sense of purpose.

Our Scripture readings this weekend give us a glimpse of the importance of commitment. At the end of the Gospel reading, we heard two people expressing their *wavering* commitment to Christ. They apparently wanted to follow Him, but they also had some other things they wanted to do, including burying a father and saying goodbye to parents. While Jesus' response to the two men seems almost callous and uncaring, He was actually trying to express the importance of a *permanent* commitment.

At first glance, it might seem as though Elisha, in the Old Testament reading, did the very thing that Jesus said not to do in today's Gospel. The prophet Elijah called Elisha to ministry and his response was, "Please, let me kiss my father and mother good-bye, and I will follow you" (1 Kings 19:20). Both Elisha and the man in the Gospel seemed to be procrastinating in following the will of God. They said "yes" to God's call, but seemed hesitant to go. In actuality, however, Elisha's response was completely different than the man in the Gospel reading.

God had spoken to Elijah and told him that Elisha was to be his successor in the ministry of prophecy. Elijah searched for his successor and found him plowing the field. He chose him for ministry in an ordinary way, by throwing his cloak over him—vesting him literally with his new ministry. It was after this investiture that Elisha asked for permission to go back and say goodbye to his parents. His goodbye was different than the goodbye requested by the man in the Gospel because Elisha allowed his goodbye to be a decisive moment of answering God's call.

We are told that Elisha went back, slaughtered the oxen and burned the plowing equipment in order to cook the oxen for his family and workers. In other words, Elisha wasn't procrastinating or questioning his call when he asked Elijah if he could go back and say goodbye to his family, he was actually making his call, his commitment, *permanent*.

In the second letter of Peter, we read, "Be all the more eager to make your call and election firm, for, in doing so, you will never stumble" (2 Peter 1:10). Some translations read, "make your call and election *permanent*..." This is what Elisha was doing when he went back and slaughtered his oxen and burned his farming equipment. He was making a permanent decision to follow God's call. He literally slaughtered his former life so that he could focus on the commitment he had made to God. This is a wonderful image and message for us as we struggle with making our own call and commitment permanent.

There are countless signs in our culture today of our hesitancy to commit completely like Elisha. Some examples might include a newly ordained priest who continues to stay in flirtatious contact with former girlfriends, the novice monk or nun who stashes money or belongings with family members and friends “just in case,” or the engaged couple who insists on a pre-nuptial agreement. These are some pretty extraordinary examples, but every day we find more common and subtle examples of our wavering commitments. And, most of us here have experienced the pain of broken commitments.

Our Scripture readings this weekend challenge us to “make our call and election permanent;” to make our commitments permanent by not looking backwards, but rather, keeping our eyes focused on Christ. I encourage us this week to take some time to “savor” our commitments by reflecting on God’s call and election in our lives.

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

- ✚ In prayer, recall the story of your vocation. When did you first feel God calling you to your vocation? When did you feel the “surest” about His call to that vocation? What has been the greatest “highlight” in your vocation so far? Share with God the things you are most grateful for in your vocation.

- ✚ Which of the areas entailed in a commitment—maturity, persistence, sacrifice, creativity, an awareness of the origin of the vocation, and a sense of purpose—do you most need God’s grace?