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1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21; Psalm 16;
Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-62
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Legend has it that a missionary was washed overboard and presumed lost on a journey to his post. The time in the water was hard, and in those days and nights alone with God he learned to live in the moment, open to God in the vast sea and sky, neither remembering his past or planning for his future. There was only now. Each breath was a gift. The young man was washed ashore near a remote village, more dead than alive, starving and suffering from exposure. The people nursed him back to health, and slowly he regained his strength and began to take part in village life. He had medical knowledge and helped with illnesses and injuries, and as his strength increased, lent his hand to any work needed. He seldom spoke. After his recovery, he lived among the people for 20 years. He never preached a sermon, sang a song, or recited scripture. He professed no faith. But when they were ill he sat through the night with them, when people were hungry he gave them food, when they were lonely he became a companion. He taught some to read, and was a source of quiet wisdom and enlightenment for those who sought him out. His kindness was without boundaries, and he always took the part of those who were wronged or oppressed. There was not a single human condition with which he could not identify.

Today's scriptures talk about the presence of God in the hearts of those who follow God. For Elijah it was a consuming passion, that he passed on to Elisha, beginning with his call, demanding and receiving a deep commitment of the whole self to God. A prophet is gifted by God to speak the truth, and to teach, but to use that gift he or she must be willing to say to God, Your will be done in me.

Elisha was asked to change his priorities, so that love of God came first. As the psalmist says, You are my God, my lord above all other. In that moment Elisha let go of that part of himself that demanded attention, that demanded a focus and a love that was serving only himself and his own needs. He suddenly saw into the heart of God and into his own heart, and felt them move as one. He was free in that moment to be all he was created to be.

The vision of Jesus that we are given by Luke is of a man that has answered that call and is so at one with God that the power of the spirit flows like water through him. Luke illuminates Jesus as prophet and teacher, as a man who is clear minded and focused on sacrificial love. He is on his way to

Jerusalem. He is willing to give all of himself, his very life so that we can be reconciled and experience God in that close connected way.

There are two stories in today's gospel that teach us something about that journey, and about the nature of sacrificial love. The first involves the refusal of the Samaritan village to receive Jesus, and the anger of the disciples. They want revenge, but Jesus refuses, and directs them to move on. Vengeance is not part of his mission, or theirs or ours. Acts of violence have no place in sacrificial love. We cannot beat someone into loving God, nor teach them of God's love by punishing them.

In 1905 a young altar boy dropped a cruet of wine, and the bishop banished him from the altar, telling him that he would never be a priest. Those words went deep. The child refused to return to church at all. Years later he became part of the communist movement. His name was Josip Broz, better known as Tito, who became Communist ruler of Yugoslavia, a man who influenced millions to adopt a way of life with no God.

About the same time, another altar boy dropped a cruet of wine, and the priest bent to him, smiling, and laying a hand on his shoulder, said, "someday you will be a priest." The words went deep. The child remembered, and later he entered seminary. His name was Fulton Sheen, who became an archbishop famous for his preaching about God and what it means to follow God in sacrificial love to millions on TV. The path of Jesus, and ours is the path of a powerful love that makes a difference.

The second part of the gospel is a story about three would be disciples who ask to follow Jesus. The first says, "I will follow you wherever you go." but Jesus sees deeply, and talks about the poverty that is part of his way. It is a poverty that strips us of our false selves, and takes us to the core of our being. It is Being that is important. Being present, being caring, being listeners, being open hearts for God, and we must put aside anything that blocks that.

Jesus uses the examples of the animals, who are essentially themselves, and find their place in the natural world, but the son of man has no place in a world that is given to human selfishness. His world, and the world of any disciple is the kingdom of God, and we are called to live it in the now, often in opposition to the world culture. Are we willing to be stripped down to our true selves, and to have God as the ground of our being?

Jesus invites the next person with the words “follow me”, but the man immediately says he must first bury his father. Jesus' responds “ let the dead bury the dead, but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

There is a difference between those who allow themselves to be filled with the spirit and transformed with the new life, and those who will not hear the call of god, or on hearing, put it off until tomorrow. These Jesus sees as already dead because they are refusing the life of the spirit. This is not about caring for family but about choosing to be alive in the spirit and free to respond to that life.

The third person says he will follow Jesus but he too has an excuse as to why he needs to wait. Contrast these three with the call and response of the original disciples, who immediately respond to the call of Jesus.

Jesus is close to Jerusalem, close to the passion. He is teaching about the radical call, the need to commit fully to a mission that will transform a persons whole life and way of seeing the world. Only those who can walk with him in full commitment will find the strength for the journey.

Paul,s letter talks about his experience of living by the Spirit, and the fruit that brings. Giving the self to God, and opening to the spirit frees us, transforms us, and lets others see God in our lives. This is the way of spiritual growth and the way that we can help to create the kingdom of God. If we invite the spirit into our lives, the community is filled with gifts that empower and energize all its members. We begin to live as the body of Christ. People find this a place of springs, a place of welcome and fulfillment, where the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, are visible.

Before you focus on your next rector, focus on your call, and on the kind of community you can build when you open yourselves to the Holy Spirit, and take seriously being and living as the voice of sacrificial love.

Legend has it that a group of missionaries set out together on a long journey to their assigned posts. The last leg of the journey was made by boat. Unfortunately a storm capsized one of the vessels, and

when they were picked up by their companions, one young man was missing. The others searched but finally had to count him lost at sea, and they continued on their journey. Twenty years later, missionaries came from the sea to a small village and began to teach about a man called Jesus, and after hearing of Jesus, the villagers insisted that he had been living among them for the past twenty years. “Come, we will introduce you to the man about whom you have been speaking.” The missionaries were led to a simple hut, and there, teaching the children was the man they had thought dead. Instead of telling people about Jesus, he had chosen to live the radical call of discipleship, to live now, being fully present to others, and to be love.

Amen