

13th Sunday, Ordinary Time – Year C

Some of you remember travel before GPS and cell phones and interstate highways. Practically every summer we traveled from home to Bridgeport, Ohio, to visit Dad's family. Dad was driving, we just crossed into Ohio, and there was a detour. Finally someone in the car said "I think we're going the wrong way." Dad said, "I've been paying attention and have followed the detour." Within a half hour we saw the sign that said, WELCOME TO INDIANA. Dad said, "You should have told me sooner." And we all had a good laugh.

We are called by God's word to be focused on our journey through life. Elijah passes on the mantle of prophecy to Elisha to proclaim God's word. Elisha who was plowing the fields with his oxen, takes time to say goodbye to his family. He slaughters the oxen, lights the fire with his plow, and feeds his family. There is no turning back now. He will follow God's call, as his dramatic gesture implies.

"No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God." Jesus passes through Samaria "on his way to Jerusalem." It is Luke's code word for Jesus' death and resurrection which will happen there. That is what our baptismal commitment is about: TO DIE AND RISE WITH CHRIST. Whoever looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God.

St. Paul puts the challenge before us. It is to live in the freedom of God's children. It is to follow Christ by dying to ourselves for the sake of other's freedom. It would seem that those who have been set free would naturally preserve their freedom, but experience reveals this is not the case. We too easily slip back into slavery, perhaps to a different institution or master, but slavery for sure.

Eric Fromm, noted psychologist, wrote in 1941 a book entitled Escape from Freedom. In it, he examines how our desire for security drives us to abandon freedom, describing the rise of Nazism in Germany as an example. He makes this key distinction:

We tend to think of freedom as "freedom from" – from rules, from restraint, from obligations. We want to be free to do whatever we wish, with no one telling us what to do. But scripture always speaks of "freedom to" – to serve, to love, to commit, to follow the Christ.

And Paul sums it up best: "The whole law has found its fulfillment in one saying: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" We are to follow the Christ to Jerusalem...to live, to die, to live in him. It is God who makes us great in the divine image, with Christ as our blueprint, with the Spirit to goad us on to glory. He is the way, the truth, the life. Are we headed in the right direction? God is good...all the time.

