

By Father Charles Bowes

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

Our faith asks that we pay more than lip service to what we believe.

Jesus makes some tough statements in Luke Chapter 9: “Let the dead bury their dead.” “Could I say goodbye to my family?” a disciple asks. “You’re not fit for the kingdom of God,” Jesus says in effect. Then along comes Elisha in 1 Kings Chapter 19, who slaughters his oxen and leaves all to follow the prophet Elijah.

Jesus’ statements are not to be taken literally. They are designed to shock – they rely upon hyperbole to jolt the person and the reader into a new way of thinking. Each response makes it clear that to follow Jesus is different from following another rabbi. It requires a depth of commitment and a single-mindedness that call upon the disciples to re-order their obligations and responsibilities.

This is especially suggested in our first reading from the first book of Kings Chapter 19 – I like Elisha’s approach. Burn up your livestock and use your plows to do it. There is no returning from that decision. That is commitment. Some scholars construe Elisha’s gesture as the embrace of his prophetic role – he feeds the

people one last time by earthly resources and from then on he will feed them through the Word of God. But I like the choice idea – the fact that Jesus called for choices on the part of his disciples – requires resolve, commitment, and focus. There is to be no turning back – the choices are to be made and kept. That’s really hard for us to do today.

This technological age that gives us so many choices conditions us to have nature suit human convenience rather than divine order. Technology gives us the illusion of being in charge of the world. We do, after all, have hands free computer chip controlled plows. Should we not be managing faith rather than faith managing us? It’s all about choices, isn’t it?

It would appear that the call for a woman’s right to choose coming from western tongues may not be so much about women’s rights as it is about human control of the nature and destiny of humankind for the sake of western comfort. That death penalty talk may not be about justice, but an ethic of retribution. That talk about balanced budget may not be about more resources for better distribution of wealth, but rather beating our plows into bomb scares. Could it be that the option for spirituality or institutional religion is an option for individualism over commitment? Are we not back to the first temptations of Jesus at the desert’s

edge, the temptations to power, control and human comfort? Jesus offers us a way out if we will just stop looking back and instead follow him – make a commitment. There is an old hymn which remains popular to this day:

*“Some folks would rather have houses and land
some folks choose silver and gold
these things they treasure and forget about their souls
I’ve decided to make Jesus my choice.
The road is rough
and the going is tough
and the hills are hard to climb
I started out a long time ago
there is no doubt in my mind;
I’ve decided to make Jesus my choice.”*

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