

Sunday, June 26, 2016

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

### Fruit of the Spirit

Summertime is almost upon us and what does this mean for our children, youth and teachers? A change in routine a change in activities and most of all a difference in routines. Some days children will have time to sleep in a little longer and depending upon the family plans, this will be changed to getting up extra early in order to travel or to go to a special place for fun or family gatherings. But most of all there is a sense of freedom in what can be done because there is no school or classes where they must attend. Freedom to sleep in, stay up later to watch a movie or play games or even just to sit and read outside. Freedom to choose what one is going to do and when. It is a gift but so often many people make choices that upon hindsight or reflection we wonder and ask why?

Our reading from 2 Kings marks the end of Elijah's journey as a prophet on earth. God is about to take him up to heaven in a whirlwind but Elisha does not want to leave his side. Elisha does not want to talk about the reality that Elijah is going up to heaven. And so they end up travelling to Bethel, Jericho, and to the Jordan River with a large crowd following them. At the Jordan River the crowd stopped near where Elijah and Elisha were near the River. At this point Elijah takes off his cloak, rolls it up and strikes the water with it. Immediately the water divides and they cross over the river. During this walk across the Jordan Elijah asks Elisha what can I do for you before I am taken from you? Elisha does not want his mentor and teacher to go and be with God. He is afraid to be the prophet alone. He has relied on Elijah and now he will be left to teach the people about God.

What would Elisha ask for? Elijah is ready to go and be with God, and Elisha has been offered anything from Elijah, the well-known and now well respected prophet of God. Elisha has received the free choice to choose anything. Freedom to choose anything—power, prestige, jewels, wealth anything. And what does he ask for? A double portion of Elijah's spirit. It is a difficult thing for him to ask and give but Elijah puts a condition on it. Elisha needs to see Elijah ascend into heaven in order to receive it. Elisha needs to see Elijah return to God and trust God. But what is Elijah's spirit that is so desirable to Elisha? What is it that makes Elisha want to be like him so much?

As they walked along, a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separates these two prophets and Elijah goes upwards in a whirlwind. Elisha sees this and cries out, "My father, my father." Then Elijah was gone. Elisha then takes hold of his clothes and tears them as a sign of mourning. He knows that Elijah has returned to God but he grieves. However, as the chariot and horses of fire go up into heaven, Elijah's cloak fell and so Elisha picked it up and using it, he strikes the water of the River with it. He asked out loud, "Where is God, now?" And when he

struck the water it divided the river. Elisha was able to cross back through the River to where the people had waited. All the people who were on the other side of the River, watched all what had happened and they exclaimed, "The Spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." Elisha had received the gift from his master, mentor and friend Elijah. But with this choice of ability, there was much responsibility.

Freedom of choice, freedom of ability, freedom to do and be, freedom to share this life with others is only possible through faith, effort and determination.

Freedom is something that we take for granted in Canada and as we will soon celebrate Canada Day, we need to be reminded about the abilities and opportunities we have in Canada that are so different than many other countries. In 1982 The Charter of Rights and Freedoms was enacted and has since become the most visible and recognized part of the Canadian Constitution. This Charter guarantees the rights of individuals by enshrining those rights and certain limits on them in the highest law of the land. This Charter has "created a social and legal revolution in Canada which in turn has expanded the rights of minorities, transforming the nature of criminal investigations and prosecution and subjecting the will of Parliament and the legislatures to judicial scrutiny as well as an ongoing source of controversy." (Historica Canada: R. Foot, 08/08/13)

These freedoms are still be sought in Canada today as people searching for what is best for them as they live in this country. And the many who have come to Canada in search of a better place to live and where they may live as they choose. This is what we celebrate on Canada Day but in reality we should be celebrating this every day.

What about you? What freedoms do we have in Canada that you consider important? This charter declares that we have these political and economic freedoms: the freedom of expression, right to a democratic government, live and seek work anywhere in Canada. There are also the freedoms for Aboriginal peoples, equality including gender equality as well as the right to speak in French or English and that if French or English minorities a the right to an education in their religion.

When Paul was writing the people of Galatia, the church was young and there were problems of people hurting each other. These were considered growing pains so Paul wrote this letter to encourage the young church and to emphasize what it meant and means to know Christ. Galatians 5:1 states, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free! This is both a statement of something realized as fact and is also a goal to pursue. Paul knew the difference between freedom and prison—he wrote this letter from prison and so when he tells the Galatians about what they were supposed to believe and put into action he writes, "Freedom is ours because of Christ. " For the Galatian people at that time and for us today we need to be reminded that our Christian freedom has not been reached by something we did—but by Jesus' death and resurrection. The Galatians believed in this freedom of faith in Jesus but needed to be reminded of their goal and responsibility.

This freedom of faith is not political or economic but based on choices and situations that were made in and through faith. Paul continues to write, you were called to be free but you are to serve one another in love. So that when you actually serve it is giving of yourself not as a slave would—they have no choice but to give because Christ's Spirit is within you and you want to do what you can for Jesus' sake. He states, "The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself," which of course is Jesus' teaching on love.

Then Paul continues to tell the Galatians how to live. Live by the Spirit and do not to give into the desires of the sinful nature. They are opposite to each other and in conflict with each other. He lists the sinful acts and then he says, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self- control. There is no law against these; do these acts as much and as often as you can. There are no laws against them. Those who belong to Christ live by the Spirit by putting away the sinful nature.

But what is this fruit of the Spirit? It is the result of the Holy Spirit's presence in the life of a Christian. A Christian will never be complete in always demonstrating the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Yet it is one of the main purposes of the Christian life to progressively allow the Holy Spirit to produce more and more of His fruit in our lives, and to allow the Holy Spirit to conquer the opposing sinful desires. The fruit of the Spirit is what God desire our lives to show and share with others. And it is possible because of the Holy Spirit.

What are the fruit of the Spirit? Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self- control . The question for you to reflect upon is this: are you bearing fruit or are you fulfilling desires of the sinful nature—Sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissension ,factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like... ? He then states, if you are living like this—you will not inherit the kingdom of God.

We are called to live and bear the fruit of the Spirit—as much and as often as possible.

As little girl was eating her dessert of fruit cocktail. In the mix of fruit were peaches, pears, cherries, pineapple and grapes. She suddenly realized that in the bowl was a grape. screamed at her mother, Mommy, the grape is naked and I can't eat it. What do you mean the grape is naked? It is not the fruit of the spirit mommy that we are supposed to do like Jesus said. I can't eat the grape. What's wrong with the grape? The mother looked at the bowl herself. The little girl than looked at her mother who was laughing out loud. The little girl said Mommy I told you it was naked!—Her mom had only peeled the grape for easier eating!

Let's pray: Holy God help us to be free to choose the acts of the Spirit as our way of living out our faith in you. Show us how to love, be joyful, have peace and bring peace, to be good and patient and kind. Enable us to be gentle as we not only control ourselves but share our faith in Christ Jesus who gives us the freedom to live and love others in his name. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.