

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

Victor Frankl was a medical doctor during the holocaust. I understand that his entire family lost their lives while he was fortunate to have survived. While imprisoned at Auschwitz and Dachau, he attended to the sick and dying camp inmates. Near the end of the war he and a companion devised a way of escaping.

He began to collect his few possessions: a food bowl, a pair of torn mittens, notes for a book he hoped to write one day. Then he took a last look in on his patients. They were lying on planks of rotten wood on either side of a hut. He came to one man who was very close to death. Frankl did his best to hide from the man the fact that he was escaping. The man was not fooled. With a tired sad voice he said, "So you are getting out." Frankl denied it, but the words "You too are getting out," seemed like an accusation.

After finishing his rounds he came back to the man. Again he was greeted with a look of despair which went right through him. He felt that he was betraying this man. Suddenly, he decided to take his fate into his own hands. He ran out of the hut and told his friend to leave without him. He was staying with his patients. At once the feeling of betrayal left him, he gained an inner peace that he has never experienced. Surviving the camps, he went on to write a number of books. His approach to psychotherapy, the search for meaning, continues to be held in high regard.

Freedom is never free. There is always a struggle, there is always a cost. Frankl had to choose between escaping the harsh reality of the concentration camp, to save his own life or remain with his patients, many of whom would die in that camp. He clearly had a commitment to the sick and dying, yet he struggled as his commitment deepened into something more. Once he chose to remain, he experienced a freedom that he knew he would never find outside the camp.

I would like to say that the sacred word this Sunday is inviting us to ponder discipleship, to understand the depth of what is expected, and then choose the appropriate path for oneself. The opening lesson from the book of Kings is straight forward, Elisha has been chosen and all that needs to be done is the anointing. Elisha seemingly was pretty successful, plowing with 12 yoke of oxen. He quickly slaughters them, prepares a feast for the people, and he follows Elijah's lead. This Old Testament lesson points us toward the gospel where it is not so direct or easy. Jesus is leaving Galilee and he has his focus on Jerusalem where he will face his passion, death, and resurrection. There are four edgy encounters in this gospel passage. It seems that Jesus wants these followers to know this is his journey to Jerusalem. Should they choose to follow, this will also be their journey. There will be some arduous obstacles they will have to maneuver.

Passing through Samaritan territory, the messengers were unable to find any willingness to receive Jesus. James and John want to respond with violent retaliation. Jesus firmly rebukes them and makes it clear that mercy toward the Samaritans is the only acceptable response.

What then follows in Luke's account are three encounters between Jesus and some anonymous individuals who are with him "on the road." These encounters are somewhat awkward, most likely because Jesus is pretty resolute, he has set his face on what will soon happen in

Jerusalem. The first encounter is with one who proudly asserts, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus points out the reality that "the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." In other words, if you really mean what you say, the journey will not be easy. Jesus then initiates the second encounter when he says to one close to him, "Follow me." Hearing the invitation, that follower hesitates because he has other commitments. The last individual is like the first one, he freely offers to follow Jesus but with a qualification. "Let me say farewell to those at home." In each case, these three individuals are ill-prepared to follow. They might well be on the road but they are not yet his disciples ... Jesus is rather blunt in pointing out the reality, they are not yet ready to commit whole-heartedly.

Our lives do change course from time to time. We find ourselves growing and suddenly we move in a very different direction. Sometimes we are dismissed and we must, out of necessity, move in another direction. Here this morning the Lord is asking for a pretty firm commitment. Should you hear the calling and you believe in me, then keep your focus on the gospel and make that gospel truly present in your life.

We are living in some turbulent times, the invasion of Ukraine, the January 6th hearings, the Supreme Court decisions, the major divisions across our nation. When we go out the door we must remember to carry the gospel with us, and give that sacred word a priority in our lives. Remember the Lord calls us to love one another, even the enemy, or the one with whom we have a disagreement.