

1 Kings 19:19-21

Dear Fellow Followers of Jesus,

The Scripture readings for today have a common theme. They all have something to do with being called to follow the Lord. They are not talking about God's call to faith. In each case the people in these Scripture readings were already Christians. The call these readings are talking about is the call of discipleship, the call to live a life of service to the Lord. These readings remind us to be ready to follow God's calling to live a life of service to God every day. Let's see what we can learn from the call that God gave Elisha and the way that Elisha responded to God's call.

You are familiar with what was happening earlier in this chapter. Elijah had challenged the prophets of Baal to a prayer contest. Baal failed miserably, but God answered and sent fire from heaven to consume Elijah's sacrifice and show himself to be the one true God. Queen Jezebel was not impressed. She threatened to kill Elijah so Elijah ran. He was depressed and holding his own pity party in the wilderness. He was sure he was the only believer left and he wanted God to take him to heaven right away. But God reminded him that he still had work for him to do. He reminded Elijah that there were still 7000 in Israel who were believers, and one of them was named Elisha. He was to go back to Israel, even though Jezebel was looking for him to have him executed, and anoint Elisha to be his successor as prophet in Israel. That's where we pick up the story today. Elijah obeyed the word of the Lord. He left his pity party in the wilderness, returned to Israel and found Elisha. As he approached Elisha he put his cloak around him, indicating that he was the one God had chosen to wear that cloak next; that God was calling him to be the next prophet of God in Israel.

As you can guess from what was happening in Israel and from the fact that Elisha was out with his servants plowing the fields, this was bad timing. If serving as God's prophet had made the queen so angry that she wanted Elijah dead, what would that mean for Elisha? If only God's call would come at a time when things weren't so unsettled; at a time when God's prophet would have the support of those in authority! If only God's call would come after the harvest was over instead of when he was in the middle of plowing and getting everything ready for planting!

Isn't that the way we tend to think? We want everything to be easy and convenient as we serve the Lord in our lives. We want worship and Bible classes to fit into our schedules. We want to witness to our faith when we know it won't get us into trouble. We say we are ready to answer the Lord's call and to live our lives for him, but we really don't want to be inconvenienced.

You really have to admire Elisha. Even though he is in the middle of plowing, a very busy time, he drops everything and runs after Elijah to let him know that he will do what the Lord is asking, he will follow Elijah and learn from him how to be God's prophet in Israel. Even though he knows that Jezebel has executed many of God's prophets and that she is trying to kill Elijah too, he shows that he is ready to follow God's call even if it means trouble, persecution and death.

We see the same thing in the Gospel lesson. Peter, Andrew, James and John had been disciples of John the Baptist. John had pointed them to Jesus as the Lamb of God, the Messiah. Now John was in prison and they had returned to their fishing business. When Jesus called them to follow him and become his disciples they were in the middle of caring for their nets. If Herod was after John wouldn't he be after his disciples too? Wouldn't it be smart just to lay low and run your fishing business without attracting undue attention? God's call came at an

inconvenient time in their lives too. Yet, like Elisha, they showed that they were ready to follow God's call.

When Elijah approached Elisha not only was he plowing, he was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen. He had twenty four animals that were bred and trained for plowing. He had twelve plows and eleven servants who were capable of handling his teams and he himself was handling a team. This was no small family farm. This was a large operation. Today we might call it a multi-million dollar operation and Elisha was the CEO. It seems that he was doing pretty well and we might assume that he enjoyed what he was doing. The same could be said of Peter, Andrew, James and John and their fishing business. Maybe it wasn't as lucrative as Elisha's farming operation but it was still their business that they seemed to enjoy.

When God's call came, all these men were ready. They were willing to give up things they liked, things they enjoyed in order to follow the Lord's calling. They were willing to give up what were much more comfortable, safe lives in exchange for trouble, persecution and relative poverty.

How is it that someone is able to do such a thing? It is only because they have learned the lesson Paul taught the Corinthians. They have learned **that the world in its present form is passing away**. They have learned to make use of the things of this world as gifts from God, but **not to become engrossed in them**. They have come to realize that sometimes God's call might mean giving up things that you like or enjoy, but they are OK with that. They are willing to give up things because they know that everything in this world is going to be destroyed on the last day. They have learned that the only thing that lasts is God and his word. The only thing that matters is being able to stand before God in the judgment and to be unashamed; forgiven.

How easy it is for us to become so engrossed in the things of this world that we neglect God's call! We hear God's call to live our lives for him and give a clear witness about what is right and wrong and that Jesus is the only way of salvation, but what if giving that witness costs me my job, or my friends? It's not easy to be ready to give up the things we like, to drop them at a moment's notice so that we can follow God's call as Elisha, and Peter, Andrew, James and John did. Their example calls us to repent for all the times we were not ready to answer God's call to follow him. Their example calls us to repent for being engrossed in the things of this world, for being unwilling to give them up in order to live lives of service to God. As we recognize and confess these sins and shortcomings we turn to Jesus and see that he was not engrossed in the things of the world. We see that Jesus always followed God's call perfectly and that he did these things in our place, as our substitute. We see those sins taken off of us and placed on Jesus as he suffered on the cross. We are assured that those sins have been forgiven as we hear him say **it is finished**, and as we see him rise from the dead on the third day.

As we daily confess our sins and rejoice in our forgiveness in Jesus we are ready to follow God's call to follow him, even if following him brings us trouble and causes us to lose some or all of our things. As we daily confess our sins and rejoice in our forgiveness in Jesus we realize that God's call to follow him is pure grace, just as his call to faith is pure grace. Just think, God calls me, a poor miserable sinner, me, the one who all too often forgets to serve him; me, the one who just wants to live in peace, safety and comfort; me, the one who doesn't want to give up the things I enjoy—he calls me, unworthy as I am, to follow him and be his disciple. He calls me to witness to everyone about who the true God is and what he has done for the world in Jesus. What an honor! What a privilege! What a responsibility!

That's the way Elisha saw it. When he went back to say good bye to his family he wasn't sad. He took his pair of oxen and butchered them. He used the wood from his plow to make a fire and he offered a thank offering to the Lord and threw a feast of celebration for his family, friends and servants.

God's call of Elisha, and of Peter, Andrew, James and John, was to what we call a public ministry. They were being called to serve the Lord as Prophets and Apostles. But they had already been serving the Lord as farmers and fishermen. That too was a calling from the Lord. God's call to live for him, to live as his disciples, to let our lights shine, to be the salt of the earth, that call is constant. It comes to us every day of our lives as Christians. Jesus is constantly saying, "Follow Me" as you serve as a Christian father, or mother; as you serve as a Christian child and student; as you go to work each day and as you interact with family, friends and neighbors.

Be ready to follow God's call to live for him each day. Realize that his call might mean that you will be inconvenienced, maybe even persecuted. Realize that his call might mean that you will have to give up something you enjoy. But, as you daily recognize your sins and how much and how freely God has forgiven you in Jesus, you will not be reluctant. You will realize what a gift of grace it is to be God's servant and to dedicate yourself to serving him in everything you say and do.