

PENTECOST: IN FAITH WE RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 8)

July 1, 2007

1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21

Psalm 16

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Luke 9:51-62

The Thread

Sometimes life seems a little disconnected and frazzled. At the end of the day we often look back at what we have done (or not done) to manage our home, raise a family, and please our supervisor. We may even add up the price we have paid as we dealt with stress, confrontation, or just the ordinary responsibilities of life in general. It is easy to wonder if there is a thread that connects all the dots in our days, giving meaning and fulfillment to the whole, even a bad day.

Like some days of our lives, the passages for this week may strike us as a little bit disconnected. After all, the Old Testament text tells a story about a new job, while the Epistle and Gospel texts speak about vice and virtue and dealing with hostile villagers (Samaritans) and reluctant followers, respectively.

But a thread does run through these readings, despite their very different story lines and social locations. It is called commitment. The story about a new job introduces us to the figure of Elisha, an obscure 9th century BC farmer who is suddenly torn away from his farm to become the assistant, and later successor, to the prophet Elijah. In modern corporate-speak, someone moved Elisha's cheese: Elisha had to face a life- and career-changing call. Despite the many reasons he could find for not obeying Elijah (giving up his home and the life of a comfortable farmer, for example), Elisha committed himself to doing so. And, as a symbol of his commitment, Elisha slaughtered his herd and burned his plow.

Paul's Epistle to the Christian churches in Galatia (the region of modern day Turkey) is often called the Magna Carta of Christian freedom. The passage from Galatians illustrates this claim: "Freedom is what we have—Christ has set us free! (5:1a, *GNT*). But as the rest of the reading shows, freedom can prove to be a double-edged sword even for followers of Christ. Freedom in Christ's Spirit requires vigilance and a commitment to a life of love and virtue. Freedom in Christ does not mean, as some in Galatia had argued, that believers are free to live wickedly.

Luke's passage marks the beginning of a special section in the third Gospel, the journey through Samaria as Jesus and his followers head toward Jerusalem (9:51-18.43). Because

of his own commitment to follow the will of his Father, Jesus undertakes this journey even though he knows it brings him into hostile territory, where the Samaritans, traditional enemies of the Jewish people, lived. Along the way, three Samaritans inquire about following Jesus. Testing their commitment, Jesus points the first toward the hardship and itinerancy of discipleship – “The Son of Man has no place to lie down and rest” (9:58, *GNT*). For the second and third, he evokes the scene from 1 Kings 19 in which Elijah calls Elisha into discipleship. Jesus declares, “Let the dead bury their own dead...” and “Anyone who starts to plow and then keeps looking back is of no use for the Kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:60, 62, *GNT*).

Yielding to the Spirit, and the charge to commit oneself irrevocably and unconditionally to God, is the thread that stitches these Scripture passages together. This same thread holds our days together as well, no matter how many disconnected hours and tasks one counts at the end of the day. Even a fragmented day filled with hardship can be a day for the Kingdom if we connect it to the great thread of commitment, love, and life that the Spirit has woven in our lives.

This week’s Reflection was prepared by Robert Hodgson, Th.D., who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Dean of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Afghanistan

– With continued prayers for peace and that God would provide opportunities to distribute his Word, particularly the Dari New Testament and the Dari Book of Genesis;
Pakistan – With prayers for the launching of the computerized Urdu Bible with study notes, for progress with the interconfessional translation project, and for the Catholic Bible Commission Pakistan and the Pakistan Bible Society teams who are working together; Iran – With thanks to God for the release of the New Persian translation and with prayers for its effective distribution and that it will bring encouragement, strength, and guidance to all who read it.

Activity Corner: “Threads of Faith” Poster Cards

Supplies needed: Bible; sheets of cardboard or poster board (11” x 14”); marker; scissor; needle; embroidery thread.

Read Galatians 5:22-25. Invite each member of your household to select a “fruit” of the Spirit mentioned in verses 22 and 23. Write the word in large block letters on a sheet of cardboard. With a scissor or other sharp instrument, make holes (1/4” apart) along the outline of the letters. Using embroidery thread, “sew” the word, weaving the thread in and out of the holes. When complete, display the “fruits” where you gather for family devotions. Conclude by reading together Psalm 16. Discuss how the “fruit of the Spirit” gives us life.