

**Proper 8 Year C 2007 RCL  
2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14  
Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20  
Galatians 5:1,13-25  
Luke 9:51-62  
Preached By Rev. Richard Smiriglia**

**“Distraction”**

Procrastination is a necessary part of modern life I suppose. If it were not for a constant stream of distractions we might actually accomplish something and have time left over! Yesterday I was stunned to find myself with an entire hour with nothing to do. I am leaving Tuesday for Europe where I will be lecturing over the next two weeks—to the shock of everyone who knows me my lectures are ready already. Usually I do everything at the last minute. I revel in the intensity of throwing my whole being into getting something done in two hours that I could have had two months to work on if only I had not give in to so many distractions.

As I am sure you all know distraction can be really useful. I like to tell how, when I served as a hospital chaplain, it was one of our duties when we worked overnight to visit everyone scheduled for surgery the next morning. I quickly learned not to visit during Jeopardy! It seemed everyone was glued to the television—no doubt because of the distraction it provided from the frightening things to come.

Of course the downside to letting yourself get distracted is what you might miss out on. And that goes for procrastination too, because after all, there is richness to be had in something that is steeped rather than boiled, in a job done gradually rather than dashed off in haste, with something deliberate rather than the product of chance. I know about that too because it took me ten years to earn my PhD. And it took me the next ten years to become a priest. Some things need deliberation. Faith is one of them.

We have two stories in our scripture today that are deliberately in parallel. We have the story of Elisha moving relentlessly forward toward his call to assume Elijah’s mantle and become the prophet of God. And we have the story of Jesus moving ever more resolutely on toward his crucifixion, to get to resurrection, and ascension. In both stories there is a sense of forward motion. In both there is the

relentless and deliberate sense of action toward a goal. And in both the goal is unity with God. And if the relentless and deliberate motion toward unity with God is not the definition of faith I do not know what is.

God calls us to put aside the things that distract us when the cost of distraction is failure to achieve unity with God. God calls us to keep moving forward no matter what when the cost of procrastination is failure to reach God's kingdom. Jesus calls us to a new kind of life in which the thing that is most important is how we love each other because that is how we are going to find the kingdom of God that has drawn near.

Paul writes: "For you were called to freedom ... only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence." Freedom is a funny sort of word for us. We live in the United States of America, a nation born in the fire of the cauldron that was the 18th century's spirit of rationalism. This is a nation founded on principles, especially as it concerns the rejection of tyranny in all its forms. We celebrate this several times a year, but especially at this time of year, we celebrate the independence won in a long and bloody war, that threw off the bonds of tyranny, in return for freedom.

And yet we do not entirely grasp the concept of "freedom." We in Philadelphia cannot forget that the newly freed nation was still one with slaves. We in the 21st century cannot miss the fact that racism and sexism and other isms still abound and that tyranny still oppresses us. But more to the point of our scripture is the notion that Freedom does not mean utter license. "This is a free country" people say to each other over and over and yet what they mean is "Therefore I can do what I want."

We live in a nation where Christianity is supposedly a major influence and yet we are far from living in the kingdom of God that Christ came among us, comes among us, to proclaim. And so we are here today to worship our God and to give thanks for the revelation Jesus brings us and to pray that the Spirit will guide us into all truth—guide us onto the pathway to God's kingdom. Because, make no mistake, the kingdom is all around us—it is just that we cannot see it.

Some faith communities want you to believe that there is a list of what is right and wrong. And especially they want you to believe

that if you pick the wrong thing—say, eating chocolate, or enjoying sex—then you will be forever denied God’s kingdom. Well, that is now how it works. This is what Jesus came to tell us. Jesus said do not get distracted by that nonsense. What matters is that you love God and love each other. Do not let the temporal keep you from entering the kingdom. Do not stop to tend your own priorities, if to do so keeps you at any instant from walking in love.

And do you understand why there is no list? Because God has given you freedom. In Christ God has given you freedom. God has given you the freedom to make the right decision—or the wrong one. Are you promoting yourself and leaving all others in the dust? You are not seeking the kingdom, and you will not find it. Are you putting aside all selfish needs and respecting and loving each child of God as you are respected and loved as a child of God? Then you will find the kingdom.

This is how it works: You have been given the freedom to distract yourselves all you want. And you are free to do so. But if you do, you will not find the kingdom. Paul says: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

So here is the message today and always. God loves you. God has saved you. God has freed you. Jesus is here to tell you to walk in love. There is no room for distraction. There is no time for procrastination. There is only time for God. Jesus said: “As for you, go –and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

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