

An Introduction by Pastor Sherwindt

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"I love the texts that have been selected for this Sunday: 1st Kings 19.14-21; Galatians 5.1,13-25; Luke 9.51-62. On the surface the theme that holds these texts together is *following*: Elisha's *following* Elijah, the fruits that flow from *following* the Spirit, and challenges of priorities that arise with *following* Jesus. In the Scriptures *following* is the technical term for discipleship, the discipline of being faithful to our Lord and God. Following would certainly make a good topic for discussion today, but I would like to get inside the background of our texts. What is remarkable about our First Lesson from 1st Kings 19 is not the graphic imagery word to describe what Elisha did to his faithful oxen, but what Elijah did on his way to Damascus. As a true prophet of God, it was Elijah's job to anoint the king with the seal of divine authority. He was a coronator of kings. Archbishops and popes have anointed kings at royal coronation ceremonies for centuries in the West. There is nothing new in that. What is unusual in Elijah's calling to anoint Hazael to be king over Aram and Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel is the fact that there were already other kings sitting on those thrones; and so Elijah was destabilizing those countries. His actions were inviting the chaos and violence that come with dueling claims to power, similar to what we are seeing in Iraq today. In short, Elijah called by God to sow the seeds of revolution.

The Latin root words for "revolution" are *res novae*, new things, a phrase that connects us to that powerful image of new creation, which we find in the New Testament. For example, there's that memorable passage in Revelation 22:5, where God says, "Behold, I make *new things*", or as we would say it, "I make all *things new*." Then there's that wonderful verse in 2nd Corinthians 5:17, where Paul writes that wherever Christ is, "there is *new creation*; old things have passed away, and all *things are new*." In short, God was in Christ not just planting the seeds of faith that might grow with the nurture of love into the transformation of new life within us. God was in Christ setting the stage for revolution, making all things new. He did this not through the traditional political means employing the methods of military hardware - whether we are talking about laser guided smart bombs or clumsy homemade explosive devices. That's the world's way of making the way for *res novae*, new things, revolution. God chose another path, namely, the way of the Spirit, which leads to new life, true life, God's life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That's the whole point of the Second Lesson, which talks about the way of the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, the freedom that is ours as we live by the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control: these are the signs that the Spirit of God is alive within us and among us. What Paul is saying, or implying if you read between the lines of history, as he writes to a people without political power, without military might, without economic means, is that you can be free, really and truly free, without the trappings of political power, military might, and worldly wealth. Trust in the Lord and live by the Spirit: this the key to new life, to new creation, to the radical revolution that is ours in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. Well, Melanie may not have been in Germany this past year to sow the seeds of revolution, but there can be no doubt that the Holy Spirit was in her

doing the revolutionary work of spiritual transformation. Her monthly updates in *The Zion Herald*, including the latest and last installment in July's edition, tell the story of her growing awareness of God's presence and power in the very ordinary circumstances of rendering the service of love and sharing the gifts of patience and kindness for Jesus' sake and in Jesus' name. We are thrilled that Melanie had the courage to take the plunge in heading off to Mecklenburg with our Young Adults in Global Mission through the ELCA. We are even more thrilled that she has returned (without her luggage, of course), and that she is with us today to share the stories of her experience abroad, and her insights into the ministry of God's presence. Melanie, the pulpit is yours.

[Melanie Sleese: Ministry of Presence](#)