

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed upon a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious, fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Luke 9:51-62

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down? But Jesus turned and rebuked them and they went away to another village. As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but as for you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home," Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.

"When Is Change Good?"

Buddhist practitioner, Sharon Salzberg observed:

We see that life, composed of this mind and body, is in a state of continual constant transformation and flux. There is always the possibility of radical change. Every moment ---not just poetically or figuratively, but literally---every moment we are dying and being reborn, we and all of life.

(Offerings, Buddhist Wisdom for Every Day Life)

Moment to moment our identity and sense of self is dying and being reborn. We are in a constant state of dynamic change.

The Buddha described us as a collection of five changing processes: the processes of the physical body, of feelings, of perceptions, of responses, and of the flow of consciousness that experiences them all. Our sense of self arises whenever we grasp at or identify with these patterns. Our world and sense of self is a play of patterns. Any identity we can grasp is transient, tentative.

(Jack Kornfield Offerings Feb. 22).

To these ancient bits of wisdom, modern psychology adds that our identity and sense of self evolves out of interpersonal relationships of trust and love.

Thursday was a perfect morning for a canoe ride. So Mary, mindful of all this wonderful wisdom and certain that life itself is the greatest spiritual discipline of all, changed up her daily routine and headed up the Town River. Normally she went alone, but this time, when she asked her friend Ted if he wanted to come along, he said, "yes." Now Ted was not a canoe enthusiast. He preferred pool over river water, golf swinging over paddling, and competitive sports over free form play. He was a perfectionist who liked to learn how to do some -thing new by watching the way in which successful practitioners of the art performed without flaw. His motto was practice makes perfect. So when it came to canoeing, Ted had a problem. He had never taken lessons, he had never studied the masters, and he was still haunted by the memory of his first canoe ride with his friend

Mary. According to his version of the event, Mary had capsized them in the middle of Lake Plymouth. For Ted, changing his mind to go canoeing with Mary was a risky move. He knew all too well that it could easily turn into the perfect storm. Fortunately, however, it did not turn out that way. On the ride they won the battle with flies, they successfully freed themselves from the grasp of the underwater fallen trees, and they managed not to capsize, thus avoiding swimming with snapping turtles, flesh nibbling fish, water moccasins, and river otters. In fact, all went well until the two adventurers arrived home. It was there, at the safety of the river bank, that the unexpected happened. While docking, Mary balanced herself as she stepped out of the canoe onto the shore, and proceeded to fall flat on her face. Ted said, "Are you all right?" Mary replied, "I don't know, I'm still trying to figure that out." After a few minutes of taking a body damage inventory, Mary said, "I caught my shoe on the side of the canoe. I'm all right. Do you want me to help you get out, or after seeing me, would you rather do it yourself?" "Myself," the man of little faith in his companion replied.

The gospel story for today begins Luke's travel log of the disciples' journey with Jesus along the road of life. It is a faith story about becoming a child of God and a follower of Jesus. As you recall, Jesus and his disciples were on their way to Jerusalem. Before getting there however, the band of travelers encountered their arch enemy, the Samaritans. So when James and John learned that the Samaritans didn't like Jesus and would not welcome them, they became afraid. It was a moment of crisis, a watershed moment for a change of mind, heart, and behavior. It was a moment of conflict, a moment of indecision in their journey of faith about what to do. Uncertain, they turned to Jesus and asked: "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down to destroy them?" The content of the question suggested the nature of the spiritual battle that they were having within. They had seen God's power at work in Jesus, they knew that God was with them, and, in the name of Jesus they wanted to take out the enemy before the enemy could get them. The need of

the self to survive had flared up with great passion within the frightened band. For God's sake, Jesus turned and rebuked them. Jesus said, "No" to the use of preventative violence. Jesus said, "No" to destruction of the enemy in his name. Jesus said, "No," because their way was a battle strategy of the self, not the soul. Jesus said, "No." They trusted him and obeyed. But the Son of Man knew that their spiritual battle for survival of the self would kick into full gear the closer that they got to Jerusalem where Jesus would face his last enemy, death. There, Jesus knew that it would be much harder for them to trust his way of self giving, sacrificial, non-violent Love. So on the way, Jesus taught his disciples about three learned patterns of the self that predictably lead to preventative, violent knee jerk responses to an enemy. Jesus named: fear of homelessness, fear of dishonoring one's parents, and fear of breaking religious tradition.

In our experience, when our soul comes face to face with the passionate needs of the self to preserve its identity, integrity, and life, it feels like a spiritual battle between the changing needs of the self. The battle unsettles us and disrupts our peace just as it did the disciples who followed Jesus. Just as Jesus anticipated, the battle causes us to question our priorities, loyalties, and commitment of faith. Years ago, when the desert fathers of the Christian faith experienced this change in a negative way, in order to grow in the mind of Christ, they reframed their struggle as a positive one. They simply asked the question: "When is the changing up our identity, sense of self, and behavior--good for our soul?" Then, in order to help fellow pilgrims keep on Jesus' way, they told this wisdom story.

Once upon a time, Abba Poemen said of Abba John that Abba John had prayed to God to take his passions away from him so that he might become free from care. "And, in fact," Abba John reported to him, "I now find myself in total peace, without an enemy." But Abba Poemen said to him, "Really? Well, in that case, go and beg God to stir up warfare within you again for it is by warfare that the soul makes progress." And after, when warfare came, Abba John no longer prayed that it might be taken away. Now he simply prayed: "Lord, give me the strength for the fight." (Welcome to the Wisdom of the World . p. 126)