

Today's readings are all about God's call and the commitment involved in following that call. They're perfect readings for our task at hand today.

Paul sets the context in the second reading. He writes to the Galatians (and to us): "you were called for freedom. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love." That's what the call to follow Jesus is all about: serving, not ourselves, but serving one another through love; and paradoxically, this makes us free.

The gospel is especially interesting; Jesus issues four different invitations to follow him. He first enters a Samaritan village. Remember that Jews and Samaritans didn't get along; and because Jesus is a Jew on his way to Jerusalem, the Samaritans do not welcome him; it's not even a consideration.

So Jesus continues on his way toward Jerusalem. He is then approached by a person who expresses a desire to follow him "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus makes it clear to him that *his* is an itinerant mission – a mission that demands mobility to go where the needs are; and so it involves letting go one's possessions – even of one's own bed. "Foxes have dens, birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." If you're going to follow Jesus, you have to travel light.

To the next person, Jesus initiates the call to follow. This person seems interested, but first wants to take care of his filial obligations to his parents. Jesus responds by inviting him to embrace a larger family: to extend his concern to all God's family as his kin: "Let the dead bury their dead." If you're going to follow Jesus, you have to see everyone as your father and mother and brother and sister. Everyone becomes your family.

The next person initiates the encounter and expresses a desire to follow Jesus: "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family." Jesus responds by saying that whoever follows him will not be able to return to what was before. And that's the story of today's first reading: the call of Elisha which comes through Elijah. Elisha was plowing the field with 12 yoke of oxen. The call came. Elisha slaughtered the oxen, broke up the plow for fuel for the fire, and fed his people. He would never go back to plowing. If you're going to follow Jesus, you will be forever changed.

In each instance, the invitation is left open-ended; we're not told whether or not the person does ultimately follow Jesus. We're not told whether any of them was able to embrace the serious demands of discipleship once Jesus spelled them out.

Today, the invitation is given to each one of us. As Paul reminds us: it's a call to serve one another through love; it's a call that makes us truly free.