

Sermon for 7-25-10
John 8:31-47

Elijah has great spiritual experience but is then intimidated, afraid and fled for his life. Then ironically he asked to die (shame?) God provided him food and drink to sustain him as he journeyed to the place God was calling him. Being God's man or woman means keeping listening to God.

Our experience is of spiritual ups and downs. Great spiritual moments that fade. Choosing to believe but then intimidated by others. Consider a child who has got a new shirt and loves it but the other kids say only babies wear that. The kid still likes the shirt but will never wear it. Even if they resist the urge to throw it away, they don't act on their belief. There is the possibility to end up with an intellectual belief that is lacking in personal commitment. Like those in the crowd earlier in John the teachings of Jesus may be too difficult and we end up walking away or standing back to watch without risking ourselves to truly act out what we believe. There is the possibility that our way of living has not been transformed by belief in Jesus.

Bell Memorial thrives because collectively we are not prepared to accept a belief that is not lived out. We know God provides us the means to sustain us in the journey he invites us to be on.

Jesus says, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples." He continues "and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free."

In John the Israelites hear this and respond. We are descendents of Abraham and have never been slaves. We hear this and respond. We are Americans. We are free. (Israelites and us say: We have in our faith and practice maintained our freedom even in times of oppression. This freedom that we take pride in is of our own making. It actually does not make us free. True freedom is God's gift to give. The scripture gives us the image of Jesus, the son who has a permanent place in God's household and we as the slave. Jesus alone can give us the gift of freedom.

True freedom comes from reliance on Jesus Christ in all aspects of the journey we are on. People prove their lack of freedom by trying to make themselves be free. Others tell us ways we can be in control of our own lives. Ironically they tell us what to do. This limits our freedom and controls God's word. What keeps us from surrender to Jesus is reliance on other things which blind us to the truth of our self-imprisonment in sin. Sin is habitually asserting our own will, where we are primarily concerned with pleasing ourselves. We are confined by our own self-interest. (Closed to new opportunities to minister, caught in our limitations, locked into one way of doing things. Like trying new food. We don't want to try something new we are fine how we are.)

We listen to those whose words intentionally or unintentionally make us discount our faith. Whose words subtly conflict with what Jesus is asking us to do to serve God. Letting God's word control us and shape us brings freedom from our lack of will power to oppose sin.

How do we know what are God's words through Jesus and what are lies? The people Jesus is talking to in John claim God as father. 1 Peter says, "If we invoke as Father God who judges according to deeds, live in reverent fear." What we do matters. What is done shows the truth of God's word.

Some may claim as the Israelites did that they are acting in faithful ways like Abraham. But what were they really doing? In John they were seeking to kill Jesus because what he said didn't fit with their idea of what God should say, they thought he was lying. They claimed to follow Abraham. Yet Abraham accepted those who came in God's name and had faith that what they communicated from God would happen. He hoped against all hope that he would be given a son in old age. He didn't discount or kill the one who brought God's word. He lived into God's word.

Those who speak to us may claim to be from God. We are often receptive because we try to understand and organize life so we can control it. We don't want to accept that we are slaves and must let Jesus be in control in a way that is real enough that our living is evidence of that. 1 Peter says that we must be ransomed from our futile ways by the precious blood of Christ.

We can't change our status by ourselves. Jesus delivers us from the prison of self. 1 Peter 1:21, "Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God." This doesn't mean that we don't do anything. That would prove we are in control because the word is constantly shaping, transforming, convicting.

Our freedom from having to overcome our sin is a constantly renewed gift. Our life evidences the truth of this gift. A good metaphor is love offered to family, spouse, children. Love is a gift we can't make it happen or control it. We can say that we love someone, but if we are physically abusing them or undermining their sense of self-worth we are made the liar by our actions. Love is given freely and proved by as it is lived out.

We can know that we are God's people. There is a difference between purified soul that is obedient to the truth. This doesn't mean perfection or no wrong choices. Rather there is a loving obedience instead of an obedience that looks for rewards or to avoid punishment. This obedience is not forced. There is evidence of genuine mutual love, loving one another deeply (constantly) from the heart. This is a love which sacrifices for others and claims God's care for all people including ourselves. This love comes from being born anew through the living and enduring word of God. (Which is Christ Jesus.)

We can continue in the word of Jesus even with so many conflicting words being spoken around us. We celebrate communion giving evidence that we not only believe his words are true but hear them. We claim and live into Jesus Christ connected to one another. Our act of sharing communion show our identity is shaped by Jesus Christ. It shows our trust in him that the food he gives us, his body and blood, will sustains us on the journey of faith into eternal life.