

February 14, 2021

**“My Lord, You Look Dazzling!”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake**

2 Kings 2:1-12

Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel.’ But Elisha said, ‘As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.’ So they went down to Bethel. The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, ‘Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?’ And he said, ‘Yes, I know; keep silent.’

Elijah said to him, ‘Elisha, stay here; for the Lord has sent me to Jericho.’ But he said, ‘As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.’ So they came to Jericho. The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, ‘Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?’ And he answered, ‘Yes, I know; be silent.’

Then Elijah said to him, ‘Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.’ But he said, ‘As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.’ So the two of them went on. Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.’ Elisha said, ‘Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.’ He responded, ‘You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not.’ As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, ‘Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!’ But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

Mark 9:2-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the

cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Sermon "My Lord, You Look Dazzling!"

In this morning's Hebrew scripture we see the prophet Elijah's life on Earth draw to a close. His disciple Elisha is heartbroken and doesn't want to let him go. Elijah, responding to his disciples' fear, asks what can he do for him? Elisha says something like "give me what he has and make it a double".

Elisha wasn't necessarily being greedy as much as he knew, due to the current state of affairs, that to continue Elijah's work he was going to need as much mojo as he could get. There had been civil war, people were trying to worship idols again, and of course the age old story, humans were putting power, privilege, and profit over the needs of the poor, the widowed, the orphan and the oppressed.

What follows in this story is that after he rends his clothes in grief, he finds the mantle that fell off Elijah, picks it up and carries on, smacking the river Jordan just like the prophets before him, and crossing over on dry land.

This passing on of the mantle and spirit of Elijah to Elisha is witnessed by a company of 50 prophets who now understand that their work will continue with Elisha as their leader.

Now we move ahead to the story of Jesus' transfiguration and we see a very similar pattern. Jesus takes the two men that he is closest to up to the mountaintop. There Elijah and Moses appear and Jesus becomes dazzling, his clothes light up in an other worldly way, and God bestows his blessing on him again.

In this moment Jesus gets the references he needs to have credibility in the eyes of the two witnesses. God, Elijah, and Moses-- imagine those names on your resume'.

In that moment we see that Peter and James are really the beneficiaries of this story, for after Jesus is taken up like Elijah, they will be the ones to carry on the work of Jesus, and so it goes...

We stand in a long line of witnesses to God's work in the world. It is our job to pick up the mantle, to carry on the mission and to let the next generation bear witness to the love we carry with us: the love of God and each other.

We have choices to make when we encounter the holy. Do we respond in fear and try and set about getting busy making an altar to “never forget” or do we get up, calm ourselves, and keep following God back down the mountain.

Back down the mountain to do more healing, feeding, and upsetting those who see no worth in the people that Jesus does; the widow, the wounded, the little children. Upsetting the people who want to put religion over love, instead of love over religion.

I think a lot about what is next for our church and for Christianity in general. When I think about what the next generation behind us has witnessed on a national level I am heartsick. The twisted perversion of Jesus and nationalism that promotes violence, domination, and subjection.

I think back to these stories where our ancestors in faith, the prophets and Jesus and the disciples had to constantly remind people of who God actually is often at the cost of their own lives.

Always shaking their fist at people and screaming, greed is not the path to God, power is not the path to god! Loving our neighbor, loving justice, caring for the least of these, that is the path to God! I want to holler, “God we need a double portion of what Elijah had because it feels like we are really a mess!”

Then I think about how when Peter was afraid, God’s response was to boom out from behind a cloud “*This is my Beloved*” in other words stop messing around with your religion, quit making plans for your little altars and go and follow Jesus.

I want there to be a generation after us that is interested in following Jesus. Not “King Jesus” who is just their ticket to heaven, their reason to feel superior to others. But Jesus the healer of the wounded, the one who cared for the people who were hungry or hurting, the one who cared more about love than power.

The Jesus that inspired our more recent ancestors in faith in this country to create hospitals, orphanages, food pantries, and homeless shelters, places that care for the widow and widower and those who can not care for themselves.

I found this quote from the Taize Community in France. It reads “God’s compassionate activity does not change the world only through isolated witnesses, but through a kind of fabric woven from witness to witness, by which men and women ceaselessly inspire one another”.

I have borne witness to God’s compassionate activity in this congregation, quite often, small but mighty-- you often pick up that mantle and go about the ministry of Jesus.

Did you know the food pantry gave away an entire commercial walk in freezer full of meat yesterday, a drive through feeding of the thousand? Two of our members give their lives to that ministry.

Even in a pandemic you have participated in making sure the homeless in the area have shelter. Isolated in your home, you organized food to a family as they cared for their loved one as he passed. You send cards when someone is healing in their mind or body or both.

You welcome others, you have flung open the doors of your church and your hearts for the stranger. Again in isolation you have sewn masks to make sure people are safe and hung them on our fence, needing nothing in return. You made sure kids had Christmas and school supplies. Over and over again I witness it.

I would like there to be more witnesses to this compassion, this love, but when I get afraid because there are not many of the next generation I remember that the important thing is that we keep following Jesus and with a double portion of God's spirit we will figure out what to do next as we go back down the mountain and cross that river. AMEN

Copyright 2020 Rev. Susan Drake
All Rights Reserved



