

3rd Sunday after Pentecost, Year C, 2022
2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14
Sermon Notes from Joy J. Moore

This tale of two prophets is shrouded in mystery and bursting with evidence of the matchless power of God.

1The two prophets were on their last journey together. The older prophet said to the younger, 2"Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But sounding like Ruth responding to Naomi, Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." 1So the two prophets were leaving Gilgal. Gilgal was special to the people of God. What had been on the east border of Jericho, Gilgal was where Joshua had set the twelve stones, which had been taken out of the Jordan, 21 saying to the Israelites, "In times to come, when your children ask 'What do these stones mean?' 22 you let them know, 'Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground.'"

(We don't do that anymore – mark the places where God's power was evident in our lives. We mark our birthdays and weddings, our special days about people and events. We set aside the weekly worship of God to honor parents, understand human relations, recognize Boy Scouts and celebrate Independence Day, but we don't have too many markers of where God has shown up in an undeniable way.) Gilgal was a place where God had shown up. Gilgal was special long before Elisha promised his mentor he would never leave him.

2So the two headed down from Gilgal to Bethel. Bethel was special to the people of God. Bethel is the place where Abraham built an altar to the Lord after God had promised him that his offspring would inherit the land where the Canaanites were. Bethel was a place where God had shown up. Bethel was special to the people of God long before Elijah and Elisha showed up.

Now, I don't think they got as far as Luther Seminary, but 3a company of preachers met them there and took Elisha aside and said "Hey kid, you know he's not gonna be with you always?" And Elisha told them all to shut up. (*I'm not making this stuff up, it's in the text, you should read what happens when a little boy calls Elisha baldy, but we won't get that far today.*)

6Then Elijah said to him, "stay here, I'm going to Jericho and then on to the Jordan" At the Jordan, Elijah took his mantle and, like Moses at the Red Sea, 8 ...struck the water; and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground. Sweet. Wouldn't want to get those Birkenstock's wet. No telling how far Elijah was gonna walk before he actually came to the end of his road. Like the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, Elisha follows Elijah on what seems a senseless journey. Like going on vacation with a history teacher, you might not meet a living relative, but you'll go to all the places where anyone ever fought, died, or bought a T-shirt. Elijah makes certain that Elisha knows the places where God has shown up, even though the people, in exile, seem to have forgotten. Elijah wants the next generation to know the past in order to face the future. We can never forget.

And along the way, it seems all the prophets know Elijah is being taken that day. But Elisha wants to hear nothing of it.

It was here, that 9... Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you."

And Elisha asks for a double share of Elijah's spirit. Let's be clear, this isn't a request to be greater than his master. Elisha isn't some arrogant apprentice about to trade his soul for a mess of porridge, a few steroids, or an easy title. This is a request for the inheritance that was given a first-born son by his father. Being a chip-off-the-ol'-block isn't just about looks and bloodline. It's about bearing a resemblance in character and conviction. (rabbi)

But it is not easy to lead a faithful life in our present society. May we never forget when they destroyed our temple. (Go ahead, think 9/11 - I'll remember the sanctuary of Mother Emmanuel in South Carolina). Foreign decisions bankrupting our economic systems. Disestablishment of entire social classes. Unfair labor practices. Political powerbrokers compromised by capitalistic gain. Militaristic policing policies. Idolatry. Adultery. Fornication. Depression. Disorientation. As the prophet Habakkuk mourned, "Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. 4 So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous-- therefore judgment comes forth perverted."

It's not easy to keep the faith in our present society. Especially when the one you followed is leaving.

10 Elijah admits as much to his apprentice when he tells him, "Do you know what you are getting yourself into?" "Kid, this a hard thing you are asking, but here's the deal: if you see me as I am being taken from you, you got it; if not, forget it."

Elijah is serving notice on Elisha that to be in the service of God is not about accolades and privilege but about turning to face death with the peace of God. Elijah is advising Elisha that to proclaim the reign of God is to stand firm while pressing forward. Elijah is warning Elisha, that the end of his term is not the end of God's working in human history. Finished isn't done.

And the warning comes not a moment too soon. Suddenly, 11 ...a chariot of fire and horses of fire separate the two of them, and Elijah is taxied to heaven in a *Dorothy-and-Toto*-styled whirlwind. Back then, when the earth shook and the mountains trembled, people's first thought was that God was on the move.

13 Elisha picks up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. 14 He...struck the water, saying, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" (Like you gotta ask?) But when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over. And about 50 prophets who had been following from a distance saw all this.

In this moment, the disruption of nature should bring to our mind a flood of images:

The parting of the waters by the creator God who spoke and dry land appeared. The presence of God evident in a pillar of fire by night and ever-present cloud by day. The drowning of Pharaoh's army as the waters of the Red Sea are released behind Moses and the escaping children of Israel. Jesus speaking and the storms calming faster than a kid on Ritalin. These displays of power, point beyond any one prophet of God to the unseen power of God concentrated in the prophetic word. A word that bears testimony to the truth of God's activity in human history. This story testifies to the fact that there is an unseen realm of God that is constantly influencing the course of affairs on earth.

15 And the company of prophets testify to where the Spirit of the Lord is: it rests upon the prophets of God. The quality has gone in, so the name goes on: *Spirit-filled*. The same spirit that took another woman's last cup of flour and opened up a donut shop where the little lite never goes out! The same spirit that healed the sick and raised the dead. With this same spirit Jesus sends out in his followers who proclaim the kingdom of God. It is this spirit that Paul writes of to the early church. Paul warns that the reality of evil in this world clouds our imagination and prevents us from viewing the glory of God. The veiling of the good news that God is, and God hasn't given up on the world is part of the amnesia of contemporary Christian expression. And the problem is that the only way the world will know this good is if we speak it. In word and deed. Paul understood us to be a reflection of God. But you can't be what you haven't seen. It is not enough to offer Justice without Jesus. Good without God. Hope without heaven. Success without sanctification. Happiness without holiness. Such teachings fail to submit good works to their revelation of the reign of God. We don't just tell folks to go and do...we put them in the presence of God and trust God still reflects his glory in us. Because it was never about Elijah or Elisha. It was always about the spirit of truth in them. God has always had a witness. And until we see him face to face, he sends out his church so that the world can see that God is God. God has spoken through prophets so that Israel would recognize Jesus as his son. And Jesus sent out disciples in his spirit to proclaim his truth. Because it has never been about us, it was always about the spirit of truth in us. **And so, we tell this story**, the old, old story that is the truth of who God is and what God is doing the world so that the church bears witness to what God is doing in the world as demonstrated in the life of Jesus. It is recorded in the Bible and Aaron Jeffrey sang it this way:

In Genesis He's the breath of life
In Exodus the Passover Lamb
In Leviticus He's our High priest
Numbers, fire by night
Deuteronomy, He's Moses voice
In Joshua, He is salvation's joy.
Judges, Lawgiver
In Ruth, the Kinsman Redeemer
1st and 2nd Samuel, our trusted prophet
In Kings and Chronicles, He's sovereign
Ezra, the true and faithful scribe
Nehemiah, He's the rebuilders of broken walls and lives
In Esther, He is Mordecai's courage
In Job, the timeless redeemer
In Psalms, He is our morning song
In Proverbs, wisdom's cry
Ecclesiastes, the time and seasons
In the Song of Solomon, He is the lover's dream
(he is...he is...he is...)

In Isaiah, He's prince of peace
Jeremiah the weeping prophet
Lamentations, the cry for Israel
Ezekiel, He's the call from the sin
In Daniel, the stranger in fire
In Hosea, he is forever faithful
In Joel, He is the spirit's power
In Amos, the arms that carry us
In Obadiah, He's the Lord our savior
In Jonah, He's the great missionary
In Micah, the promise of peace
In Nahum, he is our strength and our shield
In Habakkuk and Zephaniah, He's pleading for revival
In Haggai, He restores the lost heritage
In Zechariah, our fountain
In Malachi, He's the son of righteousness rising with healing in his wings
(He is...he is...He is...)
In Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, he is God, Man, Messiah
In the book of Acts, He is the fire from heaven
In Romans, He is the grace of God
In Corinthians, the power of love
In Galatians, he is freedom from the curse of sin
Ephesians, our glorious treasure
Philippians, the servant's heart
In Colossians, He's the Godhead Trinity
Thessalonians, our calling king
In Timothy, Titus, Philemon, he's our mediator and our faithful pastor
In Hebrews, the everlasting courage
In James the one who heals the sick
In 1st and 2nd Peter, he's our savior
In John and in Jude, He's the lover coming for his bride
In the Revelation, he is kings of kings, and lords of lords,
he is, he is, he IS
The prince of peace
The son of man
The lamb of God
The great I am
He's the alpha and omega
Our God and our Savior
He is Jesus Christ the Lord
And when time is no more
He is...
And his truth marches on...