

2/11/2018

“Holding On to the Holy”

Scripture: 2 Kings 2:1-12; Mark 9:2-9

Transfiguration Sunday

Theme: In the face of change and transition we want to hold on to whatever gives stability and security, including our experiences of the holy. With Elisha (2 Kings 2:1-12) and Peter (Mark 9:2-9) we learn to hold on to the holy by continuing ministry that shows the glory of God.

I want to start this morning with a fantastic story from the Old Testament, which some of you may already know or heard of. . .

2 Kings 2:1-12 (NRSV)

¹ Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah (the great prophet of God) up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ² 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.

³ 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.”

⁴ Elijah said to him, “Elisha, stay here; for the LORD has sent me to Jericho.” But he (Elisha) said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.”

So they came to Jericho. ⁵ 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.”

⁶ Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.” But he (Elisha) said (again), “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them went on.

⁷ Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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.”**

¹⁰ He (Elijah) 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.” ¹¹ 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.

¹² 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.

It was difficult for Elisha to let go of his teacher and father-figure, Elijah. He didn’t want to hear about it from others. He wanted to stay by Elijah’s side to the very end. And when the time came to let go, he wanted a double portion of Elijah’s spirit.

I know that letting go of someone who's been like that in your life is very hard to let go of. My own father was 75 years old when he left this world. But, I was only 28. He was the man I most loved and respected. He had congestive heart failure and diabetes since his sixties, so I had been preparing myself for some time. Yet, when his time on earth was ended, it was still difficult to believe he was truly gone. Sometimes, it still is.

† **“Change doesn't come easy”**

There are some interesting parallels between the story of Elijah being taken up into heaven found in 2 Kings (2:1-12) and the transfiguration of Jesus from the Gospel According to Mark (9:2-9).

Less than a week after Jesus affirmed to his closest disciples that he was the Messiah, we are told (**Mark 9:2-9** NRSV):

² . . . 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, ³ and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵ 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.” ⁶ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, **“This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”**

⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

⁹ 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, that is Jesus, had risen from the dead.

- Both are stories about change and transformation – Elijah's earthly body transcending into heaven, and Jesus' earthly body and appearance transformed even more so by the Holy Spirit.
- There is also a response on the part of Elisha and Peter who both want to hang on to what is known and sure.

Like Elisha and Peter, we often want to hold on to what is known and sure.

One question we often ask is . . . “What is permanent in this life? And, in the face of uncertainty and suffering, how can we make a lasting and positive impact or difference for people in this world?”

In the flow of the church year, we are about to enter the season of Lent, and we will remember Jesus' journey to the cross – and beyond. There is forward momentum in these Bible stories. . .

The question is: what are we doing with this momentum?

How are we responding to change and transition within us and all around us?

In the Gospel story . . . Jesus and his disciples come down from their mountaintop experience to encounter and address the needs of those around them, and to further spread the good news of God's love and kingdom!

In the story of Elijah and Elisha . . . Elisha goes on to become an even greater prophet than Elijah with a double portion of the Holy Spirit given to him!

These experiences gave assurance and encouragement to Elisha and to the disciples of Jesus. The assurance is that an experience of loss and transition can become a gateway to new ministry for them, as agents of God's positive change in the world.

We may not have had such dramatic experiences – no whirlwind with chariots of fire, no heavenly voices – but **most, if not all of us, have or will have some experience of knowing God's presence with us!**

† **In our own lives we can experience God's powerful and loving presence**

We can experience God's amazing grace. We can have mountaintop or peak experiences filled with awe and wonder, joy and exaltation, assurance and peace!

. . . . kind of like winning the Super bowl! Maybe even better! 😊

You see, as Jesus pointed out to his disciples, **we are given such experiences, so that we may realize who we are in relationship with God and one another.**

† And . . . **We are called by Christ to continue our journey and ministry as Jesus did – with faith, hope, love and compassion!**

We can hold on to that holy experience as we live our lives, no matter what it brings.

And, as his disciples, you, I and others can celebrate and share in his glory – because Christ's ministry continues now in all those who claim his power and his presence . . . through whom God's light shines!

(adapted from "Holding on to the Holy" by Gordon Timbers, The Minister's Annual Manual 2008-2009, Logos Productions Inc., MN)

Questions for Reflection:

1. How have you experienced God's presence in your life?
2. How has it influenced your faith, understanding and ministry?
3. How are you letting God's light and glory shine through you?