

June 26, 2022

Elijah and Elisha

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14*

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What is your call dear friends? What is it that God is calling you to do? What is it that God is calling you to do with this one precious life? The late poet, Mary Oliver, was once asked, how do you know that something is a call, a vocation? She said, "Because---[you find that] you cannot help but go there." To what are you inextricably drawn? Do you have the guts to ask God for that which you long?

Which brings me to Elijah and Elisha: two prophets from long ago. One is old and moving on, the other is young and just starting out. One is kinda loud, a bit provocative, and has stood the test of time. The other is quiet, unassuming, and as compassionate as the day is long in the end of June. An unlikely pair, some would say. Others might add that they were God ordained. Each so very different from the other, both offering a sense that God's longing for justice and hope is not a distant dream but a reality that needs to be enacted here and now. Each risking, challenging, and transforming the world in which he lives.

Elijah, you may remember has spent almost all of his adult life as God's prophet, jousting against the unjust practices of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. (It is no small wonder that very few children these days are named after either one of these two.) In earlier chapters we heard how he'd been chased up a mountain, by the blood-thirsty couple. How he was at his wits end: in need of rest, care and prayer to restore his equilibrium.

Today's piece picks up after a fair bit of time has gone by. Elijah is down from the mountain, he has followed God's instructions and called a partner, a man destined to be his successor. They are doing God's business. They are doing God's business, yet Elijah seems to want to be alone. Some commentators say he might have been having a hard time passing his ministry along to his young friend.

In any event, every time that Elijah says he is going to leave Elisha for a bit, Elisha says, "No—as God lives and breathes and as long as you are breathing, I'm going to stay with you." Elijah sighs—longing soulfully, I suspect he is an introvert at heart.

They continue to walk, come to a river, a river far too fast to cross. Elijah looks at the river, without thinking much, takes off his mantle, his cloak and tosses it down. Immediately the river in that spot dries up, the two of them cross over on dry land. Elijah picks up his cloak and dusts it off. Elisha marvels that the man does these things without so much as thinking. So filled is Elijah with God's Holy Spirit.

Again, Elijah tries to leave Elisha behind.

But Elisha resists Elijah's attempts at brushing him off. So much so that eventually Elijah says, "Ok, I give up. Before I am taken from you—what do you want from me?"

Elisha, does the thing that so many of us never have the juice to do, he says, aloud what he wants. He asks for what he needs. He says in complete and utter vulnerability, "I want to be a prophet like you. Actually, truth be told, I want to be a prophet twice as good as you, I wish to inherit a double portion of your spirit."

"Double portion, well then.... Hmmph----really?"

"That is not an easy thing you have asked—but if you manage to see me taken up to heaven it will be granted onto you. If you do not see me leave, then you will not receive this gift."

They continue to walk and talk, then from the sky above a chariot of fire, led by horses of fire descend and it carries Elijah off into the whirlwind of heaven and beyond.

Elisha sees Elijah leave-- rips his clothes in half—mourning the loss of his mentor. He cries out.

Elijah is gone.

Now what?

How to go on—without the one who has helped him so....? A raging river prevents him from walking further.

Then he sees that in the rush and crush of the flaming horses and flying chariot that Elijah's cloak has fallen behind. Elisha picks up the cloak—Elijah's mantle—and he tosses it down to the raging river. It dries up—creating a path twice the width of Elijah's trail.

What do you long to do? Who are you called to be? Might you have the faith—to ask it to be so?

Ask and you shall receive, knock and the door will be opened, seek and you will find. If we dare...will you? How could we not?

Blessed Summer Friends. So much to do. Let us get on with it, together.

Amen.