

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

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Transfiguration of the Lord

2 Kings 2:1-12

¹Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ²Elijah 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. ³The 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."

⁴Elijah 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. ⁵The 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."

⁶Then 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.

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

⁹When 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." ¹⁰He 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." ¹¹As 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. ¹²Elisha 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

²Six 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, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵Then 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." ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷Then 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.

⁹As 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.

“Mantled Up: Thin Places Abound”

“Stay Here” – Part One

Elijah kept telling Elisha, “Stay here.” “Stay here.” “Stay here.” But, it never worked. Wherever Elijah told Elisha to stay the prophet does the opposite. He keeps going on this travel log that takes him from Gilgal, to Bethel, to Jericho, and then across the Jordan.

It is not just Elijah and Elisha traveling alone. With them is the “company of prophets.” This company of prophets relates to Elisha and keeps communicating to him that “THE prophet will soon be taken from him.” THE Prophet is Elijah, that great prophet of all prophets. When Elisha hears this he keeps saying something to the effect of, “I know, now be quiet about it.”

Elisha wants to take in every moment and every step that he can with Elijah. If he is about to be “taken” then Elisha does not want to miss anything. Finally it is just Elijah and Elisha as in Moses fashion they cross the Jordan River. There is a conversation which takes place as they make their way.

Elijah asks Elisha if there is anything he can do for him. Elisha’s answer is that he wants to inherit a double portion of Elijah’s spirit. A double portion? What is with that? Is it like one scoop of ice cream would not be enough, and now you want two? “Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit.” Maybe this second in command prophet is a greedy prophet.

“A Handle on Things” – Part One

Plastic bins. Do you have any plastic bins? Of course you do. We all have them. We all buy them thinking that if we can just get things organized enough—oh, when things are organized enough we will have it all together.

Organize the closet, the garage, and maybe even the attic or the basement. Get those places organized, sorted, categorized and labeled. With all that done we then have it all together and every single solitary thing will have fallen into place.

We can organize it. We can sort it. We can get “a handle on things.” Once we do that then we will really have our life together.

Bring on the bins. I have bins in waiting. Yes, bins in waiting. They are waiting for that moment when I organize, categorize, and label the basement. Once I have the basement done I will then have a handle on things!

“Keep Moving” – Part One

We have traveled on in Mark’s Gospel, and right before we get to the mountain of Transfiguration there is a significant moment. Jesus has asked the disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” Then Jesus makes the question more personal and asks, “Who do you say that I am?” The response is uttered by Peter: “You are the Messiah.”

This is followed by Jesus telling them that he will undergo suffering, be crucified, and will rise again. To this the disciple are bewildered. It just does not make any sense.

Six days later Jesus takes with him James and John and Peter. He takes that inner circle of the disciples with him. They walk and ascend the mountain. There the three of them watch and take in this wonder of wonderful sights. They see Jesus transfigured before them. They see it with their own eyes. He is transfigured. He becomes dazzling white. He shines like the sun with his figure dressed in a white so white that it is beyond bleached white. It is this incredible moment.

Then they glimpse more than just Jesus—they are taking in the glory of God here and along with Jesus they have this incredible vision, this wondrous sight of Jesus with Moses and with Elijah too. It is beyond amazing.

If that is not enough, then the cloud overshadows those Sons of Thunder and Peter. This is no ordinary cloud. The cloud speaks. There is this voice which says: “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

Wow...what a moment. They were in awe—it had that feel of you could just stay there forever.

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“Thin Places” – Part One

In Celtic spirituality there is this understanding of the “thin place.” It is the place where heaven and earth are so close that they intersect. It is the place where heaven and earth are so close as to be indistinguishable.

Thin places—you might think of the gloaming of the day. It is that moment—and it might be that moment at dawn or at dusk, it is that moment when it is neither day nor night. They meet. They meet so close as to be indistinguishable. They meet so close that they intersect. It is that place where the veil between one and the other is so thin.

The concept of the “thin place” is a spiritual concept. It is more than a concept. It is that place in our life—or those many places—it is that place in our life where we are so close to God and so close to Christ that the distance between Spirit and physical/tangible us is no distance at all.

We have those thin places—you and I. We don’t create them. Our faith takes us to those places. They are gifts from God. They are given to us.

“Stay Here” – Part Two

It is not that he is greedy. That is not what Elisha is doing when he asks to inherit a double portion of Elijah’s spirit. The double portion is code to us. In that world the one who inherited a double portion was the true heir. That one held that place of standing in the place of the one who had died. A double portion would set Elisha apart as the new prophet of all prophets.

Such is not Elijah’s to grant, it is God’s to grant.

As the story unfolds Elisha is told that this may happen to him if he sees Elijah being taken away. And then the part of the story that seems too out there to believe it happens. It seems out there but wow what a story! Elijah does not die there but is taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot. Smoke and fire, clatter and clang—here and then gone—Elijah is heaven bound and Elisha is left there alone.

When we read beyond the reading we discover that Elisha picks up the mantle of Elijah. The mantle is a garment of a disciple. Earlier, prior to our encounter these E-prophets in today’s lection, Elijah had placed the mantle on Elisha at his calling. Now in this moment when he picks that

garment up, he is dressed in the power that allows him too to strike that water and call it back to dry ground.

There is Elisha, after Elijah is gone—there he is “mantled up” with the presence and Spirit of God upon him. God is with him and God goes with him as he makes that first journey across the Jordan. Then, when he goes to Jericho, he discovers that God is with him there too. And then on to Bethel and then to Samaria—“mantled up!” God is with him.

In Christ we are “Mantled Up!”

“A Handle on Things” – Part Two

The basement will never be done. The basement will never be organized, categorized, or plastic “binized.” It just will not happen. Admit it. Deal with it. Accept it.

The truth of the matter is we don’t ever get “a handle on things” by handling things. It is not about things. Our strength is not in everything having a place and everything in its place. That is not a mark of excellence or a measure of success as a person.

In a strange twist on how we think things should work in the world, our strength is actually that place where we realize that we don’t have to get a handle on things. It is those very places where we are vulnerable and dependent that are our sources of strength and growth.

Plastic bins aside, life is messy. And it is in that messy part and that part where we don’t know it all that God used our faith to reveal God’s glory alive in our living. To be strong is to be vulnerable. To be strong is to reckon with the reality that there are those places of deep questions. To be strong is to reckon too with the reality that there are those places in

our life where we will always struggle and question and wrestle and will never feel like we have “a handle on it.”

In our faith, God has “a handle on” us and we can trust as sufficient when we don’t have “a handle on things.”

“Keep Moving” – Part Two

They could just stay there forever. Hang out right there—oh it would be grand, there was this incredible closeness to the divine. They knew this was a good place. Maybe they could construct a dwelling place there; maybe they could build a shrine.

No. There is not time for that. Jesus does not let them linger long. He does not let them linger at all. He keeps them moving. They have had a glimpse of the glory of God, but now they have to keep moving. They have to keep moving in the way of the cross.

This incredible moment will have to suffice. It will have to be enough because they must travel now. They must travel and the road will lead them right to Jerusalem. And in Jerusalem those things which Jesus spoke of will take place.

Oh, James and John and Peter, we get it. We long to linger in the place where we feel the best. We long to hang out in those places where we are built up. We want a faith that is a string of constant moments when we feel the most connected, the most clear, and the most glorious. We want lives that are that way too—that feeling of constantly being on top of it, of being connected and clear and even of being glorious.

But life and faith are not lived in those places. Life and faith are lived on the road. Life and faith are lived headed towards Jerusalem. Faith is not about holding on to the best moments in life or hunkering down there.

Faith is about keeping moving. It is about the journey; it is about the continuing on in the way of the cross.

“Thin Places” – Part Two

We have those thin places—you and I. We don’t create them. Our faith takes us to those places. They are gifts from God. They are given to us.

We can ask for them. We can ask for them with Elisha—we can ask for a double portion only to discover all along that we are the heirs of this incredible love and presence of God. That love of God is with us and wrapping us in this “mantle” of “always with us.” We are “mantled up” in the love of God—that thin place never leaves us behind.

That thin places dares us to trust when we don’t “have a handle on things.” We can trust that the Spirit of God will hold us and help us and give us anything we need as we make this journey. Because this journey will not be all mountaintop experiences—it will be a way of the cross. And we will have to keep going, just at that moment when we would long to do anything but—we will have to keep going.

As we go...as we go along the way we come to those thin places where bread is not mere bread, or wine is not mere wine, or words are not mere word, but the Word. We come to those thin places where the world will say we will not make it, but “mantled up” we keep going. “Mantled up” we get through. “Mantled up” we see that God IS in this, God was in this, and God will always be in this.

“Mantled up” we get it that we don’t have to have thick skin but we need to trust in the thin places. Those thin places are the places that transfigure our doubt and our fear. Mantle up! Amen.