

June 27, 2010
Echo Hill Presbyterian Church

2Kings 2:1-14

Use slide #1 (Learning from Elijah.) while Scripture is read.

Learning from Elijah

I had a man come into my office this week. He just needed a minute he said. I asked him to sit down a moment. He did so reluctantly. He assured me that he wasn't there representing another church or organization – that he wasn't there to ask me to be a part of a ministry opportunity – that he wasn't there to promote a certain cause. He was quick to say that what he had to say wouldn't take that long – in fact he was to be like that prophet who was not to stop to meet or greet people along the way but that he had a message to deliver – a revelation from God.

Go to slide #2. (He was an ordinary man.)

I asked about this revelation and how it had come. He told me of sitting typing on his computer one day – when suddenly – he began to type in a way that had not been possible for him. The words flowing from his head to his hands in an alarming way.

Go to slide #3 (go down to the potter's house) as I begin talking about the Prophet Jeremiah.

He then told me that he had been sent as a sign. In fact often the prophets of the Old Testament use symbols – these very real and tangible objects to communicate God's message. The prophet

Jeremiah is taken to the potter's house where he sees the potter ruin what he was making. The potter smashes the clay back down and begins again. 'So will I do to Israel.' God said. (Jer. 18)

But the sign wasn't clay in the potter's hands – nor was it the promise of drought – nor the calling down of fire from heaven – nor the miraculous healing of someone who was sick – no the sign was the man.

Go to slide #4. (Sent as a sign.)

He had been sent as a sign – from God – a sign, he said, of revelation, a sign of righteousness, a sign of faithfulness, a sign of relationship, a sign of hope, a sign of salvation. He said other things – but those are the ones I recalled.

After he shared those things with me – he said that he didn't know what all that meant – but only that I would.

I don't know exactly what the sign might mean – all I know is that I immediately felt encouraged and filled with hope – hope for the future of this congregation. It felt like God himself had showed up at our door saying I am here – you can do it.

Go to slide #5. (Elijah and Elisha.)

Our story this morning is about these two prophets. It is a great story isn't it? Two main characters - Elijah and Elisha – prophets – those who listen to God and then speak with words, in actions, or through signs on God's behalf. Not only do we have these strong main characters in our story – but we also have these mysterious characters – ‘the company of prophets’ – who show up – doing the work of fore-shadowing the pending death of Elijah.

It is a great story – one with a lot of action. (You love action thrillers, right?) Elijah and Elisha are traveling – they go from Gilgal to Bethel – from Bethel to Jericho – from Jericho to across the Jordan.

There is building tension between the two main characters. “Stay here!” – “I will not leave you.” “Stay here!!” – “I will not leave you!” “Stay here!!!” – “I will not leave you!!”

When they get to the Jordan there is a miraculous crossing. (*Now I have seen some people that can snap a towel and put a pretty good welt on a person – but someone who can snap his mantle (or robe) on a river and part the waters that is pretty good.*)

There is the anxiousness about whether Elisha will receive a double portion of Elijah's prophetic ability – as Elisha asks and Elijah replies it is not his to give.

But the climax – the pinnacle is the arrival of the chariot of fire which swoops down and then swoops back up taking Elijah with it. It is a great story!!

But this story is to be more than entertainment for us. (I know it's hard to believe.) It is meant to tell us something about God and us and us and God. So let's think about what it might mean.

We could start by saying that this story is – on the surface – a simple story about the transferring of authority – power – from one prophetic leader to another – in order that we would see Elisha as God ordained – a powerful prophet in the line of Elijah.

But what about under the surface? Well there are many things. One commentator called pastors out – said we were chickens – if we didn't use this opportunity to talk about the 'end times' – the apocalypse – that we see in the image of the chariot of fire. (I guess I will be a chicken – cluck – cluck.)

Another approach would be to make the connections between this passage noting how it conjures up images of the Exodus – of God redeeming and rescuing his people from slavery – of God bringing them to a place of promise. – It could be interesting but I don't think that is the place for us now.

On Wednesday at Bible Study we talked about the repetitive nature of Elijah telling Elisha to 'stay here' and of Elisha's refusal. Was it a simple case of 'denial' Elisha refusing to believe? Was it a test of faithfulness – would Elisha abandon his master. Did it indicate a fearfulness on

Elisha's part or was he going to ensure his rightful place as successor? We could talk about those things – but there is something else here.

What I think it is – what I think the word of God has for us – at least right now – has do with Elisha's seemly reluctance to live fully into his calling.

His constant refusal to leave the security of his teacher and mentor – his demanding that he receive a double portion of Elijah's spirit. (Which by the way is not about receiving twice as much God-ness or whatever you want to call it as Elijah has – but it has to do with receiving the first born's share of an inheritance – twice as much as all the other children – and beside that – the title of (in this case) patriarch of the family.) It seems to indicate that the time has come for Elisha to leave the nest – for Elisha to quit learning and studying – for Elisha to quit depending on others to do the heavy lifting of faith for him.

Everybody seems to know – except Elisha – that the time has come for Elisha to strike out on his own.

Go to slide #6. (What about our unwillingness to let go?)

I think that this is so real for us. We like the familiarity and comfort of a faith that is comfortable and controllable. We will spend years in Bible Study but never feel like we have something to say about the Bible. We will spend years praying but feel in adequate in praying with others.

We will hear over and over the call of God that we are to be light and life in our neighborhoods – but will never want to leave the comfort of our familiar friends, family, and neighbors.

We will wait (while our faith dries up and dies) for the professional – that will feed us with inspiring words – prayers – who will serve others on our behalf.

This week I had a man show up at my door. He didn't represent a church or organization. He is just a guy who has been reading his Bible – praying – worshiping – serving God and others. He is just a guy and ordinary person – a person like you and me – who God had claimed and called to be a prophet.

Go to slide #7. (He said he was a sign.)

He said he was a sign – a sign from God. A sign of revelation and righteousness. A sign of faithfulness and relationship. A sign of hope and salvation.

He said that I would know what that would mean.

I'm not sure what it means – all I know is that I immediately felt encouraged and filled with hope – hope for the future of this congregation. It felt like God himself had showed up at our door saying I am here – you can do it.

What I realize is that this sign wasn't a sign just for me – it was sign for us – all of us. We are being called to leave behind the security of what we know – we are being called to live as God's people.

- We are being called out from the safety of this facility
- We are being called out from underneath the apron strings of this pastor.
- We are being called out to live as God's people – to speak a word of God's grace and mercy – to show in action God's love.

He was a sign – of God's revelation and righteousness. A sign of God's faithfulness and relationship. A sign of hope and salvation.

He said you will know what this means – and then he left.

SILENCE FOR REFLECTION.