

## 2 Kings 2:1-12

Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. 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. 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." Elijah 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. 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." Then 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. Fifty men of the company of prophets also went and stood at some distance from them as they both were standing by the Jordan. 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. 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." He 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." 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. Elisha kept watching and crying out "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.

## "Love and Justice"

In our Bible story, it was the sands of time that caused a shift in prophetic leadership among God's people. Elijah, the revered prophet of the Lord, was dying, and Elisha had been chosen to be his successor. It was a passing of the baton kind moment in Israel's history that occurred after Moses and before Israel had become a nation with a king. It was a time for choosing a prophet who could best speak for the Lord and who could lead them into God's future. For Elisha, the man chosen to follow in Elijah's footsteps, it was a time of uncertainty, doubt, and fear of going it alone. After witnessing Elijah part the sea with his mantle of authority like Moses had done, Elisha knew that he was in over his head. So, when Elijah asked Elisha what he could do for him before he left for good, Elisha begged him for a double share of his spirit. In his reflection on this verse, Walter Brueggemann commented: 'I take it he means the Spirit of God that had infused Elijah. He knew what he needed. He needed the "force of God" for the dangers ahead, the force that would matter decisively . . . he needed more than he could control or enact. He needed a gift from God' (Inscribing the Text, p. 106).

Today's story about Elisha's work as prophet for the Lord doesn't tell us much about the dangers ahead and "the force of God." At the end of it all we see is Elisha keeping his eyes on his mentor. All we hear is Elisha crying for the father of Israel's prophets. And, as he tore his own clothes, all we felt was his anguish at being left alone with the prophetic spirit of Elijah resting on him. If you are wondering what happened next to him, listen to what a Biblical scholar who loves the prophetic tradition has to say: 'He asked for a double portion and he received it. And he never looked back! He was blown by the wind into places he had never thought to go, to enact things he had never thought to do . . . into a new range of activity, into a future radically different from the past'. Elisha was blown by the wind into crisis places in society to speak the Lord's word and to enact God's power for newness of life. The narrator of

Elisha's story describes four situations into which this double portion of the Spirit sent him (Inscribing Text by Walter Brueggemann, p. 103-105).

1. In 2 Kings 4:1-7, the spirit propelled him into a concrete economic situation of poverty and scarcity. He met up with a widow whose life was to be shut down by a creditor.

2. In 2 Kings 5:1-19, the spirit pushed the candidate to commit an overt ecumenical act, a ministry outside his well-defined Israel. Naaman, the Syrian general, grudgingly comes to Elisha with leprosy, and he is healed.

3. In 2 Kings 4:32-37, the prophet who succeeds Elijah is dispatched by the spirit into the world of death (where the power of death is vibrant and pervasive, and the power of Love appears foolish and weak), there to enact God's gifts of life.

4. In 2 Kings 4:42-44, the prophet is led by the Spirit to an intimate pastoral crisis where there is a lack of food. That lack signifies that God's creation is not fully functioning and that there is a mismatch between need and resources.

What we find in each of these miracle stories is a "strange, unfamiliar convergence of human agency and divine sovereignty allied for a newness that the world had not imagined." 'The stunning outcome', noted Brueggeman, 'was the release of power for life in a world weary with the gap between creditors and debtors, exhausted with faith turned in on itself exclusively, despairing in the face of the power of death to which there seemed no antidote, fed up with so many children to feed and not enough bread' (ibid, p. 107).

On the day of his transfiguration, Jesus was seen talking with two of God's greats who had gone before: Moses (Giver of God's Law) and Elijah (Renown Prophet). In that dynamic encounter, the gospel writer identifies who Jesus is (the successor of Moses and Elijah) and how God feels about him, "this is my son, the Beloved, listen to him!" Later, when the religious leaders challenged his authority, Jesus said to them: The first commandment is: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and

with all your strength'. The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no greater than these.'

In both the UCC and UUA traditions of faith, love and justice partner up to bring about the light and life of God's reign. With UUA'ers, we affirm and promote words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love. And, we join with UCC Associate Conference Minister, Rev. Don Remick in the faith that he professes at the end of his e-mails: 'Because I believe that Living the Love and Justice of Jesus will Transform our people, parishes, and planet' . . . (to which Brueggemann adds) with the spirit that seeks an economic intervention that closes the gap between creditors and debtors: an overt ecumenical act that values those unlike "us": an Easter foray (raid) into the sphere of death to bring life: and a pastoral feeding, bespeaking the generosity of the Creator (ibid, p. 107).

Last Monday night, as we looked forward to my retirement at the end of May, Rev. Remick gave our church body homework to start on right away. The first assignment is to fill out a Local Church Profile which helps us identify the ways in which we live into the Love and Justice of Jesus. There are three questions.

- 1) **Who are we** . . . our identity, historical strengths and patterns, our assets, our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges.
- 2) **Who is our neighbor** . . . who are the people who live in the neighborhoods where church members live, what are their longings, fears, hopes, dreams and spiritual needs. . . and, what are the needs of neighbors around the globe . . . and future generations.
- 3) **What is God calling us to be and do** . . .

Prayer. Because we believe that the Living Love and Justice of Jesus will transform our people, parishes, and planet, come, Holy Spirit, come. Deepen our awareness of ourselves, help us see our neighbor, and focus us in mission. Amen.