

Bible Study
Proper 8, Year C
June 26, 2016

[RCL] 2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14; Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20, Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-62

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-16

He picked up the mantle of Elijah... (2 Kings 2)

The 2 Kings reading provides us with the basis for the expression “picking up the mantle.” In the 2 Kings reading, Elijah is about to ascend into heaven and Elisha requests that he inherit Elijah’s Spirit. As Elijah ascends into heaven, he drops his mantle, and Elisha literally picks it up. With the mantle, Elisha has the same power as Elijah to part the waters. We see that the spirit of discipleship, leadership, and evangelism has passed to the next generation. During this time of year, there are many graduations. Frequently, in this context, we hear about passing the mantle to a new generation.

- How can we pass the mantle of faith and discipleship?
- How can we inherit and embrace the mantle that has been passed to us?
- How do we carry forward the mantle of Christ, like Elisha carrying forward the mantle of Elijah?

Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20

My hands were stretched out by night and did not tire. (Psalm 77:2)

This psalm celebrates God’s leadership and the psalmist’s persistence. When Elisha inherited Elijah’s mantle, he was taking on the responsibility of that mantle, which would require tireless work and challenges. Similarly, in Luke’s gospel, Jesus challenged his followers to have the courage to move forward and follow him.

- When it gets challenging, how do we keep stretching ourselves?
- How do we maintain our persistence in our faith and discipleship?
- What are those things that reinforce our discipleship so that we can stretch out our hands tirelessly?

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

For you are called to freedom, brothers and sisters... (Galatians 5:1)

In the Galatians reading, Paul introduces the fruits of the Spirit, and suggests that Christians find true freedom by living faithfully. This results in the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Who would not want those things? But, Paul also poses a challenge because he brings a very dualistic view to faith. He contrasts the “works of the flesh” with the “fruit of the Spirit.” We are challenged to hear what Paul is saying about faith setting us free, without letting the dualism capture us in a more limited view of faith. As Richard Rohr writes about, we are challenged to move away from an “either/or” view of our faith to an “and/also” view.

- How do we live into our faith and embrace the fruits of the Spirit?
- How and when do we see the fruits of the Spirit in our lives?
- How do the fruits of the Spirit set us free?
- What do the fruits of the Spirit tell us about our discipleship?
- How does Paul’s dualism influence our faith? What are the benefits and the challenges?

Luke 9:51-62

No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:62)

The Gospel seems to pull together all the other readings from this week. Jesus is looking to pass his mantle to his followers, but it is not a conventional mantle. He rebukes James and John for looking to command fire to come down upon the Samaritans who do not welcome them. Jesus will not be a fiery, vengeful ruler. Moreover, Jesus challenges his followers to drop everything and follow him. He compels a son to forego his father's funeral and "Let the dead bury their own dead," which was a very radical idea in heavily patriarchal 1st century Judaism. Jesus goes on to conclude with an even greater challenge for his followers. "Don't look back." Anyone who looks back to their life before Christ is not fit for the Kingdom of God. Upon landing in Veracruz, Hernan Cortes ordered his crew to burn his ships, so they would move forward confidently. Jesus seems to be calling us to do the same. Faithfully move forward; don't look back.

- How do we develop the courage to move forward without looking back?
- How might the fruits of the Spirit give us the confidence to move ahead without looking back?
- If we embrace the mantle of Christ, can we move forward without looking back?
- As we proceed through "ordinary time" in the liturgical year, how can we embrace our faith and discipleship?

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