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6.30.19

1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21
Luke 9: 50-62

I'm happy to be here. This my 3rd time in this pulpit, 5th if you include youth Sunday (Which I do). All over many years growing in this congregation and three years of seminary but now, with a Masters of Divinity. And, this time, with two bits of scripture about the ways that a new beginning can be both an invitation and a threat.

These are worthwhile stories. They are honest accounts of the tender side of Christian discipleship, the side that asks us to turn inward before we ever get to turn outward. And how to go out together. So if you are starting anything, summer camp, picking a cable provider, a new job, those new beginnings will serve you well this morning

Last Fall I took half a load of classes at seminary and spent the other half at Grady Hospital as a chaplain. It was a wonderful experience and hard in a hundred different ways, all of which I'd be happy to talk about later if anyone is interested. We had a week of orientation before it began, and we spent eight-hour days reading a 200 page guide to chaplaincy and hearing from other staff chaplains about their

experiences in the trauma rooms, or emergency rooms, or the psych floor, or post-surgery... all of them. It was the start of something new;

On the last day of orientation we had nothing scheduled. My three chaplainites and I were to walk the 16 floor hospital and meet people. Just walk in their rooms and see what a Chaplain could do in that space. We had to put on the chaplain jacket. And that, was when the 200 page guides and the personal stories were all forgotten. Frustrated nurses, patients in pain, fellow chaplains caught off guard and unable to offer the best advice. The human stuff.

Our scripture brings up those moments. The human moments on the cusp of a difficult new beginning. And lucky for us, they come in world of common phrases twisted into new meaning and sounds that reverberate from the OT to the NT and back again. They're fun to hear..

There are two stories, one of Elisha choosing to follow Elijah into a prophetic unknown, and one of Jesus speaking with those who may follow him just after he turns his face to Jerusalem, anticipating death and resurrection, and just before he commissions a band of disciples to go and spread the Gospel. Two stories of spiritual leaders following

God's command to assemble a ministry team and start a new beginning.

We find Elijah as he comes off the mountain at Horeb where he begged God to end his prophetic ministry, and to end his life, because he was being pursued and hated. God responds through a profound silence. A thin, eerie silence. Commands Elijah to go back out, to prophecy with new vigor, and find Elisha. He will commission Elisha to do the work that Elijah has done up to this point.

Elisha is working the fields with twelve pairs of oxen, an immense amount of wealth in live-stock. Elijah tosses the sign of his own ministry, his mantle, on Elisha and walks away.

In Luke, Jesus has also just come down from a mountain where he was transfigured before Peter, John, and James. God was revealed on this mountain as well. And Jesus returns with a focus on Jerusalem, death and resurrection, fulfillment. He too comes looking for disciples, and he finds them.

Both men offer their potential disciples an invitation and a threat. Asking for commitment from the followers they believe in, and a

warning of the difficulties ahead. Both men come across as frustrated spiritual leaders, wary of the hardships that discipleship will always entail.

We only get these little snapshots of training the next group of leaders, of team building, but we know many ways to gather up a team for a particular purpose.

Early on in life we just pick two captains and ask them to choose how the game will unfold. Usually the best at the particular task.

Sometimes we gird up against the unknown and keep our goals close to our chest. We create secrets. To not commit too much of ourselves to one outcome. To duck and dive about the struggles to come, or the ways we hope to win. The conversations are rarely straight forward when trying to build a team.

Or we approach would be followers with all the rules in the beginning. I was reminded of this recently because I've rented three or four different Uhaul rental trucks in the last couple months to move out and move in all sorts of places. Every time I click the Terms of Agreement page, and check the box that yes, I read the Terms of Agreement to not

damage the Uhaul. Or drive it too fast, And every time it kicks back and says I need to at least open the document “Terms of Agreement” so everyone is on the same page that I read and agreed to all rules beforehand. Building a team by laying out every worst-case scenario.

So I really appreciate the weird energy, and frustrated intensity that Elijah and Jesus bring in these stories. We get to see how WE all respond to the weird energy of a great and prophetic God.

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Elijah tosses his mantle over Elisha and walks away. Elisha runs after him and says “Please, can I say goodbye to my family...” Elijah mocks him for not taking the ministry seriously. Moody spiritual leaders, at times. Frustrated. Elisha accepts that sarcasm and still returns to his home.

He slaughters his animals and liquidates his wealth, for the people. And if Elijah had wanted a quick move from mantle to ministry then he does not get it; slaughtering 24 oxen and feeding the people cannot be a speedy task. When the nourishment ends, Elisha goes on with Elijah.

What a model of discipleship and leadership and teambuilding... To ask reasonable questions about those we love, to receive frustrations that run deeper than any glance can tell, to see one another and nourish those around us. Then go out together. What a model of discipleship and leadership and teambuilding.

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Reasonable Questions: Can we punish them for acting like disciples when they really are not? No. Can I bury my father first? No. Can I say goodbye to my family first? No. *No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.* Jesus sneaks in his clever reference to Elijah and Elisha.

What happens when the reasonable questions bump against frustrated answers? When care for a family, and attention to tradition, and rejection of others bumps up against the gospel? We know that will happen, whether a moment in our own lives pops into our head or not. We see it right here.

Both Elijah and Jesus point us to look at our lives first. Not to point out at what others are doing or not doing. Not to romanticize the next step

we are about to take. But to assess what we have. Is it saying goodbye to family, or is it nourishing family? Is it discipleship for personal gain, or do we understand that not all people want to support a disciple. Are you willing, in yourself, to make clear shifts in thought. To go from here to there with nothing attached.

That's tough. And some translations, including the NRSV in the pews, title this section in Luke the "Would Be Disciples." Our "would be's" never say they won't still follow Jesus. They never get the chance in the text to go back and liquidate their wealth. But we all know, we can feel, they don't take that step. At the rub of a reasonable question and a frustrated reality, their humanness shows too brightly and they step back from the light. Or is that just us..?

We read this passage in Luke alongside this passage about Elijah and Elisha in 1 Kings not because they both include great spiritual leaders coming down from mountains and offering clear advice on plows and oxen and foxes and birds. No. We read these because Elisha shows how hesitation and doubt work.

Elisha shows us that the commandment to move forward in our spiritual life, to accept the mantle thrown on us by unexpected

prophets, shocks us. He shows us that even in our most honest desires, to love our family and respect our tradition, we will rub against the reality of the call God places on each one of us. And Elisha, full of reasonable requests, mocked by the spiritual leader at his side, lets his hesitations win. He goes home first. And he slaughters his oxen, liquidates his wealth, nourishes his family.

Elisha walks away with Elijah, right at the rub of reasonable questions and frustrating realities. And after our passage in Luke, Jesus commissions seventy disciples. Who is to say those “would be disciples” did not come along with Jesus at the rub of reasonable questions and frustrating realities. We don’t hear from them.

I don’t know if you had June 30th marked on your calendar as a day to start some big journey, but these passages certainly ask us if we should look out for that journey, that shocking prophet, that call.

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The profound and everyday work of a church requires that someone asks the most reasonable questions and someone dwells on the most

frustrating realities of the Gospel. And go out, together, anyway. I hope we can keep doing that. Amen.