

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14; Psalm 16;
Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-62

Grace and peace to you from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen

At Saturday night worship we have been using the semi-continuous reading of the first lesson. That's an option, and so the last several weeks we have been hearing about Elijah in our first lesson. It started a few weeks ago with 1 Kings, Chapter 17, where we hear of the call of Elijah. Elijah goes to Ahab, king of the northern nation of Israel. He tells Ahab that, because of Ahab's idolatry, there is going to be a drought. Elijah then quickly goes over to town of Sidon in the county of Zaraphath, which also happens to be the homeland of the woman who hates him, Queen Jezebel.

Jezebel and Ahab, of course, are king and queen of Israel. (Remember that when King Solomon died the country split in two. The geographically smaller portion is called Judah and is ruled from Jerusalem by a descendant of King David. The northern portion is geographically bigger and is called Israel and the capital is Samaria. This is a military kingdom and very rarely does a son follow a father.) Elijah is up there in the northern country of Israel and God tells him to go to Sidon and get a room with a widow and her son. As long as Elijah is with this widow they never run out of wheat and the oil jar never runs dry. Tragedy strikes, however, and the son dies. The Lord God Almighty through Elijah restores life in the boy.

Then we heard the story of Ahab's lust for a plot of land in order to plant a garden. Jezebel arranges for the execution of the legal owner of the land, so her husband, Ahab, can come in and confiscate the piece of property. Elijah, of course, doesn't let them get away with this, and tells them in some rather graphic and specific detail exactly *what* is going to happen to them because of this horrendous abuse of power.

The lesson from last week was about Jezebel bent on killing Elijah, because he is instrumental in leading an uprising of the people against the prophets of Ba'al, the god Jezebel worships. Because of this uprising, and Jezebel going after him, Elijah goes into hiding. In chapter 19 of I Kings read about this great wind storm, but God is not in the wind. Then there is an earthquake, but the Lord is not in the earthquake. Then comes a raging fire, but the Almighty is not in the fire. Finally there is the sound of sheer silence, or as you might have learned it in the King James Version, a "still, small voice." In that silence, or "small voice," God speaks to Elijah, and he tells him, among other things, to go and get himself a helper. Specifically, a fellow named Elisha.

(Do you want an "Action Bible?" I'm telling you, read the following chapters I Kings 1-22, in a recent translation, sit down, and hold on!) Throughout most of this, Elijah has been the lone wolf, the single gunman, the "Clint Eastwood," of prophets – he is going to do it himself! That is, until he brings Elisha on board. Even then,

you don't hear a lot about Elisha. Once Elijah throws his mantle on Elisha's back in chapter 19, but we really don't hear any more about Elisha until our reading this morning. (A quick note of clarification here: we've got two guys whose names sound almost identical - Elijah and Elisha. Elijah, with a "j", comes first, and Elisha, with an "s", is his handpicked successor. If it helps, think of them alphabetically, "j" comes before "s".)

Apparently, Elijah has been a good mentor, because as we heard in our reading today, Elisha doesn't want to let go of him. Elijah knows his time has come and he is ready to go, but first he has to go to the departure site. As they are traveling along toward Bethel, Elijah keeps trying to shake off Elisha, we don't know exactly why. Maybe it's because he's trying to spare Elisha's feelings, maybe he's been alone too long, and can't handle the goodbye scene himself. Whatever the reason, he keeps telling Elisha to "Stay here," and Elisha keeps saying "No."

(A bit of a humorous aside - a few verses got cut from the reading. As they're going along, they keep running into these groups of prophets. The prophets keep pulling Elisha aside and saying 'Hey, you know Elijah's about to die, right?' to which Elisha replies 'Yes. Now shut up.'). (Okay, that's the Brock translation, but you get the drift.) Elisha asks for a final blessing. But Elijah says that it's not his to give, but he *does* tell Elisha how to achieve that blessing. That blessing, by the way, is phrased, "Let me inherit a double share of your spirit" (I Kings, 19, vs. 9) is the blessing held for the first born son. So in a way, Elisha *is* Elijah's family. Regardless, Elisha is able to complete that asked for blessing, as he watches Elijah be one of only two people in scripture who never experience death. (And No, the other one is not Jesus. If you really want to know, ask me after worship)

Elijah and Elisha have this bond. It is almost like father and son. They are like mentor and student. The one has a profound and life changing influence on the other. I want to tell you about a profound and life changing instance that I just learned about this past week. I have this friend. She's really cute, talented, and amazing. She also happens to be director of one our church camps. Anyway, this year during staff training, Marianne brought to camp a panel of folks to talk to the counselors who are in training. This was made up of folk who have been involved with Nawakwa in various capacities throughout the years.

One of the people who were asked, let's call him "James," began as a camper at Nawakwa, when he was 11 years old, back in the seventies. He now does youth ministry at his church, and has done so for several years, all because of what happened to him that very first week that he ever attended Nawakwa. James grew up on the proverbial "wrong side of the river." He grew up in a part of Harrisburg that was, shall we say, ethically challenged. He grew up in a single parent household, where his mom really didn't have enough time for him. So due to the influence of those around him, he was going down a path that may have led him somewhere else. Still, James when to Nawakwa that summer, and was assigned to a cabin with a counselor named "Slick." (It took Marianne two weeks to find out who this guy really was, so I can his known nickname. His female co-counselor was called "Pocahontas," so I think we can be fairly certain that ALL the counselors that summer went by pseudonyms.)

The first afternoon, they were gathered in the assembly hall, and then headed over to the field to do one of those outdoorsy kinds of things they do at camp. But James wasn't interested in doing something outdoorsy, Remember, he was a city kid. He spotted a piano, sat down and started to figure out the tune to a song that he had heard. All of a sudden he realizes that Slick is now sitting on the bench. James tenses up, figuring at the least, he about to get yelled at for not being where he's supposed to be. But instead, Slick says, "I didn't know you could play the piano," and together they figured out the melody to the song. Here was an adult, taking a positive interest in him.

Two nights later, they're having a sleep out and are lying there in the field, looking up at the night sky (which by the way, is much darker and the stars much brighter, there outside of Arendstville, than they are around here), Slick was explaining about the moon and the earth, how if the moon were even a degree closer to the earth, or if the earth's tilt were to vary by even a degree, there could be massive changes to the earth's atmosphere and environment. While Slick is enlightening these campers on the wonders, the wheels are turning in James' head. He is thinking: there is a design going on there. Somebody, or some mind, had to be behind this in order for everything to work together so well. James blurts out, "There had to be a plan behind all this," and then realizes, oops, he did it again. Butted in when an adult is talking and he readies himself for the verbal backlash. Instead, Slick pauses, and responds, "You're right, James. That is exactly my point. It shows the creation." They went on to have a good theological discussion.

There's a lot more to the story, but you'll need to talk to the camp director to get the rest. What you do need to know about this is that this counselor, this college aged young man, so influenced that 11-year-old youth, that instead of heading down the path that many of his neighbors were going, he became more active in his congregation. He took a serious look at his faith life, and now, some thirty some years later, he has been leading a youth ministry at his congregation, and is a vital, positive member of his community.

My point here is not so much, Go to Camp, It will Strengthen your Faith, - although you should and it will - my point is that we are *all* like **both** Elijah and Elisha. We both influence others and are affected by them, as well. Not only in our lives, but in our faith. How we allow God to use us in all situations, has repercussions and benefits far beyond what we might be able to see. Think of all the ways and places that positive influence can happen. Yes, of course, there is the obvious one of parent and child, and of mentor and student. This is part of the reason we have mentors for our students as they go through Affirmation of Baptism class. Boss/employee is another possibility, or even that of counselor and camper. Sometimes these influences happen across the sand of years. Sometimes, like in the case of Slick and James, they happen and the folks involved don't even know about it.

Next week (at Saturday night worship) we will hear the story about Elisha's big event in scripture. That too, is really cool and has some far reaching consequences. Today, though, as we leave here, I pray that we might be like both

Elijah and Elisha. Like the student and the teacher. The positive influence and the receiving vessel. That we might pray to God that the mantle of God's grace falls upon us, and guides us, in all that we do.

Amen.

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