PENTECOST 3

Proper 8 - Year C

*This Bible study was written by **Brendan Barnicle** for Proper 8 (C) in 2016.*

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-16

2 Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to
heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on
their way from Gilgal. [2] 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.

[6] 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. [7] Fifty men of the
company of prophets also went and stood at some
distance from them, as they both were standing by the
Jordan. [8] 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, and the two of them crossed on
dry ground.

[9] 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." [10] 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." [11] 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. [12] Elisha kept watching and crying out,
"Father, 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.
[13] He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen
from him and went back and stood on the bank of
the Jordan. [14] He took the mantle of Elijah that had
fallen from him and struck the water. He said,
"Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah? Where is he?"
He struck the water again, and the water was parted
to the one side and to the other, and Elisha crossed
over.

[15] When the company of prophets who were at Jericho
saw him at a distance, they declared, "The spirit of
Elijah rests on Elisha." They came to meet him and
bowed to the ground before him. [16] They said to him,
"See now, we have fifty strong men among your
servants; please let them go and seek your master; it
may be that the spirit of the Lord has caught him up
and thrown him down on some mountain or into
some valley." He responded, "No, do not send
them."

Commentary from Brendan Barnicle
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.

Discussion Questions

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

[1] I will cry aloud to God; *
I will cry aloud, and he will hear me.
[2] In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; *
my hands were stretched out by night and did not tire; I refused to be comforted.

[11] I will remember the works of the Lord, *
and call to mind your wonders of old time.
[12] I will meditate on all your acts *
and ponder your mighty deeds.
[13] Your way, O God, is holy; *
who is so great a god as our God?
[14] You are the God who works wonders *
and have declared your power among the peoples.
[15] By your strength you have redeemed your people, *
the children of Jacob and Joseph.
[16] The waters saw you, O God; the waters saw you and trembled; *
the very depths were shaken.
[17] The clouds poured out water; the skies thundered; *
your arrows flashed to and fro;
[18] The sound of your thunder was in the whirlwind;
your lightnings lit up the world; *
the earth trembled and shook.
[19] Your way was in the sea, and your paths in the great waters, *
yet your footsteps were not seen.
[20] You led your people like a flock *
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Commentary from Brendan Barnicle

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.

Discussion Questions

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

5 [1] For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

[13] For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become enslaved to one another. [14] For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." [15] If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

[16] Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. [17] For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. [18] But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. [19] Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, [20] idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, [21] envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

[22] By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. [24] And those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. [25] If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Commentary from Brendan Barnicle

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 and "and/also" view.

Discussion Questions

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

51 When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he
set his face to go to Jerusalem. 52 And he sent
messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a
village of the Samaritans to prepare for his
arrival, 53 but they did not receive him because his face
was set toward Jerusalem. 54 When his disciples James
and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do you want us to
command fire to come down from heaven and
consume them?" 55 But he turned and rebuked
them. 56 Then they went on to another village.

57 As they were going along the road, someone said to
him, "I will follow you wherever you go." 58 And Jesus
said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air
have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his
head." 59 To another he said, "Follow me." But he
said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my
father." 60 And Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury
their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim the
kingdom of God." 61 Another said, "I will follow you,
Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my
home." 62 And Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a
hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the
kingdom of God."

Commentary from Brendan Barnicle

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.

Discussion Questions

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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