

June 26, 2016  
2 Kings 2:1-15  
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## **“Two Important Questions”**

Last Sunday Rosanna gave us a snapshot of 1 and 2 Kings and shared the story of Naaman. Today I am going to back up to look at the transfer of prophethood from Elijah to Elisha. Someone read this passage this week and asked me, “What in the world can you say about this story?” My answer was, it poses some important questions to think about.

The actual call of Elisha is in I Kings 19:19-21. God instructed Elijah to anoint Elisha as his successor. Listen to the story.

*<sup>19</sup> So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. <sup>20</sup> Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. “Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye,” he said, “and then I will come with you.”*

*“Go back,” Elijah replied. “What have I done to you?”*

*<sup>21</sup> So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant.*

What was that? I tried to find a commentary to explain some of the unfamiliar symbolism. Did Elijah and Elisha know each other prior to this meeting? What was significant about throwing his cloak over Elisha? When Elijah asked “What have I done to you,” what did he mean? Was he saying like Jesus, “Nothing else takes precedence over my call, not even family”? Or was Elijah saying, “Whatever! Do what you want, it’s nothing to me!” And then the sacrifice feels a little over the top to me, but it was

probably Elisha's way of showing God and Elijah, "I'm all in!" Then he takes off to become Elijah's servant.

Now we can skip to II Kings 2. The way the story is told and the repetitious number "three" sounds a little like a folk tale. Three times Elijah said, "I'm called out of town; why not stay where you are?" Three times Elisha insisted, "I'll never leave you!" Three times local prophets warned Elisha that Elijah was going away. Three times Elisha replied, "I know—be quiet!"

After the three side trips, Elijah and Elisha finally reached the Jordan River. Elijah struck the water with his cloak, the waters parted, and they walked across on dry land. Knowing time was short, Elijah offers Elisha a gift. "Tell me what I can do for you before I leave." Elisha asks for a double portion of his spirit. Elijah's response sounds passive, "Whatever [*my words*]! If you see me go, you will get your wish; if you don't see me go, you won't." A chariot and horses of fire came down from heaven. A whirlwind separated them, and Elijah was lifted up to heaven. In the process, Elijah's mantle fell to the ground.

Elisha cried out, "Father, father!" and ripped off his clothes. Eventually, he picked up Elijah's mantle and went back to the Jordan River. As if to test his "double dose," he struck the water with Elijah's mantle, and the waters parted. Elisha crossed the Jordan to become the new minister prophet, to pass on to Israel what God revealed to him.

The following chapters of 2 Kings tell a series of miracle stories. You may be familiar with some of these:

1. A widow's husband died, and the creditors were coming for their money. The widow panicked and asked Elisha, "What shall I do? I am poor—I don't have any money." Elisha said, "What do you have?" "Just a little oil," she replied. Elisha instructed her to go to the neighbors and get all the jars they would give her, and then fill the jars with her small amount of oil. The oil kept pouring until all the jars were full. Elisha told her to sell the oil and pay her debt.
2. The next story is about the Shunamite woman who recognized Elijah as a holy man, and offered him food and lodging every time he came to her town. She even added a room onto the house just for him. Elisha learned that the woman could not bear children, so Elisha told

her in one year she would have a child. The baby was born and grew. Suddenly, one day the child died. Elijah brought the boy back to life.

3. Next is the Naaman story that Rosanna told last week.
4. There are stories about a lengthy and devastating famine that took place, and stories about God providing for the Israelites. There is also a gruesome story of two mothers arguing over sacrificing their babies to survive.
5. Eventually the stories morph into political legends, where it seems that God is messing with the political armies to bring Israel out on top.

Let's go back now to II Kings 2 and look at the two important questions.

First: "Why not stay where you are?"

Three times Elisha was asked this question. Each time he answered "I will never leave you."

This is a question for the church. Crossing the Jordan means leaving old ways of thinking and embracing new patterns of ministry. We may prefer not to change when real action is moving on. Do we stay where we are or move on with a double dose of the Spirit? I read a sermon called "Good to go,"<sup>1</sup> and some of the thoughts I will share come from this anonymous author. "There is a vast network of tradition that invites us to stay put." There's the nostalgia of familiar music, the comfort of a homogeneous group, or the assumption that our style of Christianity is the right, or at least right for us. Jonathan Shively reminded us in a district-sponsored workshop that we keep stubbing our toes when we rest on the success of what once worked and keep trying to make it work again. Judy DePue noted in a *Connection* report of the workshop, "The church is not the unchanging place of stability, God is."

An article in *Current thoughts and trends* shares this story. "In Africa, missionaries Alejandro and Bertha Ortiz reach a Muslim population by ministering to them in what has become known as "Jesus mosques."

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<sup>1</sup> "Good to Go," a sermon from [www.homileticsonline.com](http://www.homileticsonline.com)

**Muslim converts to Christianity “leave their shoes at the door, ritually wash their hands and feet, and kneel and pray on reed mats five times a day.” But this is not an Islamic mosque, and thus there are some significant differences. When they pray, they face Jerusalem, not Mecca. They worship Jesus Christ and read and study the Bible. This is a powerful method of reaching a vast segment of the world’s population without “removing them from their traditional culture.” Jesus mosques are springing up now throughout the Middle East and Asia.”<sup>2</sup>**

**This challenge to stay or go is not for the church alone, but for all of us who struggle to be faithful along the journey. God comes to us with a unique offer. The second question is:**

**Second, “What I can do for you?”**

**“What an incredible offer! The check is blank and God suggests that we fill it in. Elisha asked for a double dose of his spirit, and he received it. Likewise, God’s double dose can empower us to go beyond the nostalgia of yesterday into the opportunities of tomorrow, beyond myth into reality, beyond the old ways of doing business to new inventive ways of faithful discipleship.”<sup>3</sup>**

**The church must move on, just as culture moves on. Kevin Graham Ford makes this point using coffee as an example. “In an agrarian economy, farmers grew coffee and traded the beans for other products. In a product economy, farmers learned to grind the beans, package the grounds and sell them at the local store. In a service economy, customers could sit at a counter and be served a cup of coffee. In today’s economy, a \$4 cup of cappuccino is served in pleasant surroundings with soft music, books and magazines.” Ford writes, “Barnes & Noble and Starbucks know consumers want more than products and services—they want an experience.”<sup>4</sup>**

**“People yearn for something—anything--that offers authentic experiences not rooted in the past, but stretching to the future. An authentic church thinks about how to help people experience the presence of God on the deepest levels. The church is situated in a unique moment in history; it is able to offer what it does best—authentic experiences of the holy and the**

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<sup>2</sup> Current Thoughts and Trends, January 1998, 29

<sup>3</sup> Anonymous sermon.

<sup>4</sup> “Mass-customized church experience” in Current Thoughts and Trends, January 2998, 2).

**divine!” Wearing the mantle of the Holy Spirit can make us an authentic church with authentic faith.**

**When asked “Why not stay where you are?” Elisha answered, “I will never leave you.” So let me ask you this question. “Why not stay where you are?” And you respond, *“I will never leave you.”***

**When Elijah asked Elisha, “What can I do for you before I leave?” Elisha answered, “Give me a double dose of your spirit.” Let me ask you this second question. God says, “What can I do for you?” And you respond, *“Give me a double dose of your spirit.”***

**May we as Creekside Church determine to follow where God leads us, and may God give us a double dose of his spirit. And I trust all God’s people will say, *“Amen.”***