Mentoring and Mantle-passing

For children’s Sunday, 2019

# Scripture: 1 Kings 19:19-21; 2 Kings 2:1-15

# Key Thought: The story of how Elisha inherited the office of Elijah teaches us many things about how God calls and puts into his service men and women today.

# Intro idea

Pass the bat from the older child to the younger as the older child moves into an older league and passes the bat to the younger child.

# Elisha received a call

In the story of Elisha and Elijah, what did the passing of the coat, cloak, or mantle from Elijah to Elisha represent?

Elijah’s cloak or mantle was a symbol of his prophetic office and authority. The passing of the cloak or mantle from Elijah to Elisha becomes a metaphor for the passing of the office of prophet.

The first passage we read, 1 Kings 19:19-21, tells how Elisha became Elijah’s attendant. That was the beginning of Elisha’s journey as a prophet of God.

I believe we can learn many things about how God calls and puts into service men and women today from these two passages of Scripture.

The first thing we learn is that in the church, God calls people into God’s service. Now sometimes we volunteer and God confirms it. Sometimes the church asks and God confirms it in our hearts. But even in these cases, I would say that God has been at work in our minds and hearts beforehand, moving us to act.

It is so helpful and even essential when we are working for God to have a sense that we are doing exactly what God has called us to do.

# Elisha was prepared

As soon as Elisha was called of God, and tapped by Elijah for the position of prophet, then Elisha’s season of preparation for that role began under the mentoring of Elijah. Elijah had a crucial role to play during this time in helping the one who was to succeed him to be ready for that time when it came. In the family of God, all of us need to think of ourselves as having that same responsibility—helping those who might be the ones who follow us to be ready to succeed in the offices we now hold.

## Elisha’s preparation

When the day came for Elijah to be taken up into heaven and for Elijah’s prophetic office to be passed on to Elisha, Elisha was prepared. What was involved in this preparation?

### Preparation through the discipline of submission.

Now, I know that the word “submit” is not our favorite word in America. But there is something to be learned here. Remember that the Bible admonishes us

“Submit yourselves to God.” James 4:7 NIV

In accepting God’s call as a prophet, Elisha was submitting to God’s plan for his life. But his submission to God would also be expressed in submission to Elijah.

Elisha had already been a prosperous farmer. The Bible tells us that he had twelve pair of oxen. When Elijah found him, Elisha was driving the 12th pair himself. We can deduce also that Elisha was a middle-aged man as soon after the transition takes place he is described as a bald man. So, Elisha was undoubtedly used to giving directions to others. But now he is relegated to the position of Elijah’s assistant - his apprentice, if you will. It’s a change of status for Elisha. Now, he must submit to the directions of Elijah.

The discipline of submission an important part of the training of all God’s servants. In Hebrews we even read that Jesus learned from the discipline of submission.

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions
with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was
heard because of his reverent submission. Heb. 5:7 NIV

In our lives, the discipline of submission comes into play in different ways. Sometimes God disciplines us by clearly calling us to be involved in a ministry that is not easy or not our desire. But we always find that by submitting to God’s ways, we are blessed in the long run. Maybe we learn submission by being called to work under someone when we would rather run the show. Maybe we learn submission by sensing a call to stay in a ministry longer or to change ministries sooner than would be our choice. The key thing is that we are seeking to be in tune with God’s direction, not just serving our own will and desires. That is a hard thing to discern, but if we are not even trying to listen for God’s direction, it is hardly possible.

### Preparation through learning.

The second kind of preparation we need is the discipline of learning. This is where the mentor relationship helps so much as those who have experience and knowledge pass on their wisdom to those who will follow them.

Paul wrote to Timothy,

Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you.” 2 Tim 1:6 NIV

I listened to a testimony this past week from a father. He had been a successful football player and then became a Christian leader. He told the story of how his step-father served as a beloved mentor to him. One day, when he was a young teen his stepdad said to him, “So what do you want to do in life?” The young man answered definitively, “Play football.” The next morning, his stepdad woke him up early and took him for a ride. He dropped him off four miles from home and said to him. “I’m going to fix you breakfast, order anything you want.” The following morning, the stepdad did the same. But the young man was sore from the day before, so he tried to hitchhike home. But the stepdad was watching. He circled back and said to him. “I thought you might do that. What we are doing here is paving a pathway to your dreams.” To make a long story short, the discipline soon became a habit, even when the father was away. The long-term result was that the young man rose quickly in his football career because he was the fastest lineman around. His stepdad knew the secret of preparation through discipline and learning. And the young man learned the secret from his wise step-father.

Elisha was accomplished as a farmer, but he was just starting out as a prophet. So, he had to learn. Even in Elisha’s day there were schools for prophets. Whatever God calls us to do, we will need to learn about it too, and keep learning. And mentors will need to help. Even though I’ve been a pastor for 40 years, I am still learning. I finished reading as good book this week called, Flood Gates – Holy Momentum for a Fearless Church by Sue Nilson Kibbey. I learned some excellent concepts that I wish I had learned many years ago. By-the-way, not all our mentors are there in person. Some of our mentors will be authors and seminar givers, experts that we learn from repeatedly at a distance.

### Preparation through persistent following.

One quality that God needs in his servants is perseverance. Elisha had to persevere. That quality of his character was tested on this last day of Elijah’s life. Elijah kept giving him permission – even inviting him to stay at several places along the way as the journey became long. But Elisha was determined to persevere and stay with Elijah. This is a lesson for us in the necessity of the perseverance. The writer of Hebrews wrote;

You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.” Heb. 10:36 NIV

Both preparation for a position and mentoring others usually take longer than we would like. We need patience and perseverance.

It is easy to persevere in following God, in helping in the church, in pursuing ministry when everything is exciting, when plans are working out, when promotions occur quickly, when people are giving you lots of positive feedback. But when it seems like not much is happening, when there is criticism, when other people disappoint us, perseverance is essential.

There is a refrain in the book for Revelation;

This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God’s people. (Rev 13:10; 14:12)

The Greek word is “hupomeno” which literally means to remain under – that is to keep going under the testing—to persevere.

# Elisha sensed a change coming

After an extended time of preparation, Elisha sensed that God was going to take Elijah home. Prophets in both Bethel and Jericho, two cities along their journey, confirmed it. Elisha wanted to be present when it happened.

In one sense, this seems like a story from long ago. But I believe that it has a very contemporary and a continuing application.

## Elijah’s are always moving on.

Every year in the fall our church nominating committee needs to fill positions where someone is moving on from their position of service to God and the church for one reason or another. Think about the wider church as well. For example:

* A Mom has another child and has to resign from a church office for awhile
* A missionary’s health situation requires coming home.
* A pastor retires – I hope to do that someday.
* A Sunday School teacher moves to a different ministry.
* A prayer warrior graduates to heaven.

But all such changes in God’s harvest field today are no surprise to God.

## God is constantly looking for and calling new Elisha’s to fill their shoes.

One of the special events at the annual conference each year is the time of ordination for pastors and commissioning of deacons. This is always an exciting service which begins with the pageantry of a fully robed precession, continues with inspiring worship music, and in the case of the NY conference also includes amazing worship choreography teams from the city. Each year, after the commissioning and ordination time, Bishop Bickerton takes a few moments to ask those assembled if God is speaking to their hearts, calling them to step up to serve in such roles. This year there were many who came forward for prayer during this time.

But God is not just calling people to be pastors, he calls people to all kinds of work. As United Methodists, we believe that each person is “called into ministry by virtue of his or her baptism.” (Guidelines-Nominations and Leadership Development p. 4). –not just pastoral ministry, but all different kinds of ministries. Yet, we know that we don’t tend to act on that belief until we feel a personal and immediate spiritual nudge to do so.

The Holy Spirit is continually at work calling us to service. Some feel led by God to teach a class, host a Bible study in their home, serve on the church council, or work with church finances. Others sense an urge in their spirit to be a prayer supporter of the church, to work on the technical committee, to sing in the choir, or to help behind the scenes with upkeep or cleaning. Some feel led to visit a neighbor who is sick, or to invite a person who just started attending church over for dinner. You get the idea. Others sense God’s tug to be involved in their community in some definite way since God desires us to be salt and light in our community. God is constantly calling Elisha’s to his offices of service to himself and to others.

When this happens, mentors will be needed to help them learn the ropes and to give them encouragement as they serve.

## Jesus asked us to pray for this process.

This Holy Spirit enabled process of tapping new workers in the kingdom is so important and crucial that Jesus instructed his followers to pray for the success of that process. When I meet with the Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development, we begin and end with prayer specifically for this process in our local church. I also pray for this process regularly personally as I sense needs in the local congregation. Jesus said,

 “Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matt 9:38 NIV).

Do you see a ministry that is suffering in your local church? Pray for it. Ask God to either replace it with a better one or to send new workers to give it new impetus.

# Elisha picked up the mantle of Elijah and continued his ministry.

## Elisha’s key request

The office to which Elisha aspired was not one a person could be equipped for only by watching. It required also a supernatural anointing with God’s Spirit.

Elisha recognized the role of the Spirit and asked for it. He asked that God would grant him a double portion of Elijah’s Spirit. I don’t think of this as Elisha being greedy. Rather I think of it as a combination of deep admiration for Elijah as a man of Gods and a deep sense of personal inadequacy and need for God’s help on Elisha’s part.

I’m afraid that sometimes we are not aware of how much we need God’s help. Sometimes we are tempted to take over an office or ministry on the strength of our own natural abilities. That is always a mistake. And mentors, if we give the impression that we do our work for God in our own natural abilities alone, then we are doing those who follow us a huge disservice. God will use all our natural abilities for sure, but without the Spirit’s anointing, the results will be disappointing. When we do the works ourselves, in our strength, we get what humans can do. But when we move our ego’s aside and seek for God to work, when we pray for God enabling power, when we look for God’s direction, then we get what God can do.

So we, like Elisha, must cry out for the anointing of God upon our lives for the work to which we feel called.

## The climactic moment

The climactic moment of the story is certainly when the chariot of fire separated Elijah and Elisha and Elijah ascended to heaven on a chariot of fire. Elijah becomes one of only two people in the Bible who did not die a normal death. (Enoch is the other (Gen. 5:24).) Elisha saw Elijah ascend into heaven and he saw Elijah’s cloak fall to the ground.

Elisha picked up the cloak, the mantle of Elijah. In doing so, Elisha knew that he was not just picking up an item by which to remember his mentor. It was a powerful symbol of the office of prophet which Elijah had held. Just as Elijah had originally used that same cloak at the time of Elisha’s call to symbolize the calling of Elisha to be Elijah’s successor, now as Elisha picked it up from the ground, he realized that he had indeed succeeded Elijah as prophet.

## God was with Elisha

One of the great fears that we have when accepting a new responsibility, especially if we are inheriting it from someone who has filled that role well, is whether we will be able to do the job. How much more this was true for Elisha who was looking at following Elijah – a prophet who had called down fire from heaven on Mt. Carmel, who had called upon God to restore the life of a dead child, and who had been responsible for the notable miracle of the jug of oil that would not stop flowing. How do you follow a prophet like that?

But as you noticed in the Scripture that we read, God had arranged a simple lesson in assurance for Elisha. In 2 Kings 2:8, when Elijah and Elisha had come to the Jordan River in their journey, Elijah had taken the cloak and rolled it up and struck the Jordan with it. The water had parted like it had earlier in Israel’s history for Moses at the Red Sea and for Joshua at the Jordan River with the army of Israel. The text contains no real indication of surprise at this event. It was not so much about the person, it was about the obvious presence of the living God with the current spiritual leader of Israel.

So after Elisha picks up the cloak of Elijah and assumes the mantle of his prophetic office, he starts walking back, retracing his steps of earlier that day. He comes to the Jordan River. It is a natural test. I’m sure it took courage. But he followed the lead of his mentor. He took the cloak of Elijah, struck the water as Elijah had done and exclaimed, “Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah?” The question was not, “Have I got what it takes?” The question was, “Where is the Lord…” If Elisha thought he was great, he would fail. What he needed to know at that moment was exactly what Joshua had needed to know when Israel had reached the same Jordan, “Is God with me”? (Joshua 3:7,10). And the answer came. The water parted as it had for Joshua centuries before and as it had for Elijah earlier that day. Elisha knew that God was indeed with him.

## God will be with us

When Jesus commissioned us to do his work, he promised to be with us too.

 “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matt 28:18-20 NIV

# Conclusion:

Is there a service or ministry to which God is calling you to pick up for Him today?