

Sermon for Sunday, June, 30, 2013 2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14/ Luke 9:51-62 "The Price of the Bequest"

It's hard work, being a follower of Christ. Jesus makes that perfectly clear in his words in today's Gospel. You want to follow me? Be prepared to have no home. You want to follow me? Be prepared to leave your family behind. You want to follow me? Be prepared to hear people misuse my words as you feel helpless to respond.

You would think that my calling, to be a priest in God's church, would mean I'd have to sign on for all those things that Jesus talked about, all those warnings about how hard it would be. Frankly, it's been easier than that, and it raises some questions for me as to whether I'm doing enough, or being enough.

I have a roof over my head and a place to rest my head at night. I have a husband by my side and adult children who support my work. I have a parish full of people who generally agree with a good amount of what I say when I preach, and I am part of a denomination that does things in ways that I find live-giving. Yes, there are people out there who – in my opinion – misuse God's word, but I have the option to ignore them or to respond to them.

So am I failing in following Jesus? I'd like to say no, but I do wonder about this. Am I living into my ministry as fully as God desires, or am I taking an easier way?

It's an interesting question: what do we commit to when we commit to being followers of Christ?

Elijah, whose story has been told over the past few Sundays in our readings from the books of Kings, has done one difficult thing after another. He has called out King Ahab, he has called out the people of Israel, he has called out everyone who has not been faithful to the covenant between the One True God and his people. He's been on the run, trying to avoid getting killed. He's nearly starved, but for some miraculous meals along the way. He's survived, with a trainee prophet, Elisha, most recently by his side. And now it is time for him to leave this earthly plane. He will be lifted up by a fiery chariot, and in preparation, he is about to place his mantle on Elisha's shoulders as the one who will carry on his work for God. Elisha says "please give me a double portion of your spirit."

Elisha has asked for a bequest from his spiritual father, Elijah. He hasn't asked to be a prophet. In fact, he hasn't acted as a prophet the whole time he has been accompanying Elijah. He's been like – here's the word – a disciple. And now his spiritual father is leaving – sounds a little like Jesus talking to the disciples about the work in our Gospel passage – and Elijah says what we may have been thinking when we heard Elisha's request "It's complicated. You're asking for a hard thing that is God's to give you, not mine." We may think that the emphasis is on the "it's God's to give" part, but in fact it is on "you're asking for a hard thing."

Disciples, whether they are apostles of Jesus, or spiritual disciples of the prophet Elijah, have to face the fact that signing on to be a disciple means entering into a complicated and demanding relationship. It's not easy. It's not glorious. It's not powerful. It's just plain old hard, and there are no guarantees of applause from the onlookers. In fact, the only guarantee is that it will be hard.

So why would anyone offer themselves to be a disciple, if that's the deal?

It's easier to come up with a top ten reasons list for NOT becoming a disciple than one for becoming one. Just think of what the "not" reasons might be:

10. you might get killed.

9. no one will understand what you're saying.

8. if you say it's a message from God, they might lock you up in a psych ward.

7. you might get killed...

...and it goes on from there.

Now try to construct a positive list:

10. I love God, and God wants me to do it.

9...I love God, and God wants me to do it...

....mmm, hard time coming up with the next eight reasons, except that first one, which is a lollapalooza.

I love God. God calls me to be and do something that is hard, but I love God so much, that I want to at least try to do it. I feel his love and his encouragement, and even though I'm afraid, even though I don't know if what I am doing is exactly what God is looking for, I am going to attempt it.

All of my fears and confusion and doubts are trumped by that still small voice in my ear, whispering as it did to Elijah "Go." Go and do something. Do something small, do something big – it doesn't matter. Mother Teresa wisely said "we can do no great things, only small things with great love," so don't stop trying because you fear what you are doing as a disciple isn't big enough or important enough. Am I doing enough? I'm never sure, but if I simply dither and wonder about whether or not it's enough, I won't do anything. So what I do today will have to be my starting place.

Elijah threw his mantle – his cloak – over Elisha's shoulders as a final bequest. Jesus gave his disciples the power and authority to help and to heal and to teach as a final bequest. But there was a codicil to the will that was that bequest: you've got to do something with it. Elisha grew into his prophetic role from his disciple role over time, taking that bequest of the spirit and the mantle of responsibility that went with it. The disciples of Jesus grew into the leaders of the church over time, taking the bequest of their gifts of teaching and leading and healing and putting them to good use for God's people.

Go. Do something. Be a disciple. See how it will transform you. See how it will transform the world. Amen.