

“STAY HERE”

II Kings 2:1-12

Transfiguration Sunday, Feb. 11, 2018

One morning in 1837 at the Royal Palace in England, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Head of the Church of England, and the Lord Chancellor of London, awakened a young lady who was only 18 years old at that time. They awakened her to tell her that her forbear had died and that very soon she would be crowned the new queen of England: Queen Victoria—Queen over the whole British Empire—so large—so far reaching—that upon it the sun never sat.

That’s when the Archbishop knelt beside this young woman’s bed and prayed a little prayer with her—that Solomon prayed when he first learned that his father King David died, and that he would now become the successor to Israel’s throne (I Kings 3:7-9). Solomon prayed: *“O Lord my God you have made your servant king in place of my father David, but I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. So, give to your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong! For who is able to govern this great people of yours?”*

How about you, my friend? Have you ever, suddenly or unexpectedly, had some great job thrust upon you, or some huge responsibilities committed to you for which you may have felt **just a little bit intimidated**, a little bit **unqualified** and maybe over which you were also somewhat **dumbfounded**?

And then to make matters worse there are those people around you who were there to quickly remind you what a **“STAR PERFORMANCE”** your predecessor always gave to every aspect of that same job! Why how in the world—could you possibly do the job as well as they did?

“You have some mighty big shoes to fill!” they told you!

I can’t help but wonder if this is not what Elisha may have been experiencing when we first meet him in our Old Testament lesson today? Five chapters earlier in **I Kings 19:19-21** we learn that he will become Elijah’s successor, but from then until now he is never heard from again!

Perhaps it is helpful for us to think about Elijah and Elisha and the relationship they enjoyed as being a little bit like that between **Elijah’s being the professional prophet with loads of experience and Elisha’s being the untrained apprentice**—gladly receiving all the **“on the job training”** he can before the big day arrives!

My brothers and sisters, someone has pointed that there is nothing that will BRING TEARS TO YOUR EYES FASTER THAN FOR YOU TO WITNESS SOMEONE ELSE DOING EVERYTHING THEY CAN TO PREVENT SOMEONE ELSE FROM BEING HURT—whether it is physically, emotionally or spiritually; and I believe that this was Elijah’s **primary motive** here in telling Elisha three different times: **“STAY HERE!”**

Of course, our whole Old Testament lesson today is prefaced with that gigantic revelation of what will soon take place in the first verse where we read: **“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 Kings 2:1)!**

But by this time—Elijah and Elisha—had become like a spiritual father and a spiritual son in their relationship together; not unlike the relationship that the Apostle Paul would have many years later with those two younger pastor Timothy and Titus. Paul even refers to them in the New Testament as his “sons.”

It was a polite request—including that all important magic word: “Please!”
But can’t you just hear Elisha saying to the older gentleman: “No can do!”

I don’t believe that Elisha was being disrespectful in any way—towards Elijah, or subordinate. Elisha’s response to Elijah here reminds me of that other great episode found in the Old Testament, where the Moabite daughter-in-law named “Ruth” refuses to allow her beloved mother-in-law “Naomi” from returning to Israel alone after both of their husbands had died!

Though Naomi was doing her best, I am sure, to be every bit as much convincing as Elijah was doing his best to be convincing towards Elisha here—Ruth just wasn’t going to accept “NO” for an answer. Therefore, she speaks those marvelous words of her undying commitment; words often still read at many weddings today: *“Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go, I will go and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God my God! Where you die, there will I also die and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you”* (Ruth 1:15-18)!

Friends, I titled the sermon today with these two words of Elijah’s spoken three times: “STAY HERE” because this is a call that often goes out to you and me too, not necessarily by our fellow believers, as much as it is a call that goes to us from the world.

“Stay here;” that is, “stay home” there is no reason for you to get up out of bed and to make your way to Church services and to Sunday school this morning! And it is not just with respect to our opportunities to worship that we can hear the world calling out to us: “Stay here.”

How about when the call of discipleship comes to us? Jesus’ call, by his resurrection power, still comes to us repeatedly today—a call that is constantly going out to every one of us—never for us to be content any longer—to merely sit on the sidelines of the playing field only as an observer!

“The fields are white and ready for the harvest!” our Lord say to us. And then he invites each one of us to become in a large way the answer to our own prayer when he continues: *“Pray, therefore, for the Lord to send out workers into his harvest field!”*

“Let none hear you idly saying, here is nothing I can do! While the multitudes are dying, and the Master calls for you! Take the task he gives you gladly; let his work your pleasure be! Answer quickly when he calls you: ‘Here am I send me, send me!’”

The world calls out to us: “DON’T BECOME INVOLVED IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH! STAY HOME INSTEAD AND READ TWO MORE CHAPTERS IN THAT EXCITING NEW NOVEL YOU BEGAN READING LAST TUESDAY NIGHT!”

I just must believe that Elijah only had Elisha’s best intentions in mind, when he encourages him to stay home, BUT JUST STOP AND THINK OF ALL OF THE GREAT STUFF ELISHA WOULD HAVE MISSED OUT ON IF HE HAD STAYED BEHIND!

- First, he would have missed out on all of those stimulating personal conversations he, no doubt had Elijah, while they were traveling together. Just think of all the wisdom and insight Elijah must have imparted to

Elisha along the way! Perhaps Elisha could have said the same thing that Cleopas and his companion said to one another after they walked along the road to Emmaus with the Risen Christ that first Easter afternoon: *“And did our hearts not burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures” (Luke 24:32)?*

- And in each of the three places where Elijah journeyed, first to Gilgal and then to Jericho and then to someplace along the Jordan **there was a guild of prophets who came out and conversed with these great men too!** Think of all the encouragement and many promises of prayerful support Elisha may have received from all those other men of God who were there!
- While there were three different occasions also when someone wanted to **do their best to “put the fear of the LORD” into Elisha by reminding him, “Your master is going to be taken away from you soon!”** Elisha says, “Yes, but I don’t want to hear about it!” At first, we might think that Elisha is **experiencing some form of denial here; a natural human reaction** when the unpleasant news comes out way! But what if this isn’t an avoidance technique being voiced to us here by the Elisha at all! He **simply doesn’t want to be so troubled by the possibility of future events that he misses out on the things that God is trying to show him, to teach to him as well as the wisdom that God is longing to impart to him in the present!**
- Besides this—by his traveling along with Elijah—it also become possible for him to witness a mighty miracle. God commands Elijah to take off his cloak, to roll it up and then to strike the water with it—and the water departed into two different bodies of water, not unlike the way that Moses opened the Red Sea at God’s command and that Joshua opened the river—leading at long last the people of Israel into the Promised Land at the time of Moses’ death. **HOW COOL WAS THAT!?! IF ELISHA HAD STAYED HOME HE NEVER WOULD HAVE WITNESSED THAT. IT’S AMAZING WHAT GOD CAN DO IF PEOPLE ONLY HAVE ENOUGH FAITH TO GET OUT OF THE GOOD LORD’S WAY!**
- **BUT THEN ELISHA ALSO IS ASKED BY ELIJAH IF HE HAS ANY FINAL REQUEST!** And don’t you love the way that Elisha responds to that question: **“Make, mine a double please!”** It’s not a request that Elisha was making over at **BJ’S WAREHOUSE ON HARBISON AVENUE AT HAPPY HOUR!** **HEAVENS NO!** Elisha was no dummy! If he was going to be carry on Elijah’s ministry, he had to have the same power available to him that Elisha had—a deep personal anointing needed to come down upon him of the Holy Spirit of God!

As the firstborn prophet to follow Elijah is his prophetic ministry, he would receive a double inheritance, just as the oldest son of the father received a greater inheritance following the father’s death than the subsequent sons did!

If Elisha had stayed behind, stayed home—he would never have had the opportunity to watch Elijah be carried up into heaven in that magnificent chariot of fire! And what a miracle that must have been!

One of the greatest parts of my growing up in Daytona Beach, Florida, is that I often had an opportunity to view with my own eyes those manned spacecrafts that were lifted-up into the heavens at what was first called “Cape Canaveral” and then later “Cape Kennedy” and then later “Cape Canaveral” once again!

Those passengers were lifted-up into heaven with a ball of fire surrounding them too, so I certainly don’t have any trouble, myself, validating the historicity of what we read as being true in our Old Testament lesson today!

Should I go, or should I stay? It's a question we all must answer with respect to many opportunities we are given in life.

Peter wanted to stay on top of the mountain with our Transfigured Lord atop Mount Horeb in our Gospel lesson today! "Hey, Jesus! This is mighty cool! This is splendidly terrific! Let's stay here a while longer! I can even build us some makeshift accommodations, Lord, if you would like?" But Jesus said no!

He had to leave that place to continue his journey to Jerusalem which makes our celebration of the Transfiguration of our Lord this morning to attend our Ash Wednesday service this coming Wednesday.

Let me close by telling you about this one clergyman who had a growing reputation as a powerful preacher of God's Word, though if the truth be known, the sermons themselves were written for him by a very talented younger staff assistant! Finally, the assistant felt he was being taken advantage of for too long, so in writing what he knew would be his final sermon for this other man, he wrote at the bottom of page two of the sermon manuscript, "So now, my brothers and sisters, let me tell you precisely what the Book of Habakkuk is all about!" only to turn to the next page and find four big words printed on that page: "Now you're on your own!"

I am so glad that these were not the parting words of Jesus on the night before he died! Heaven's no! He promised to his disciples then even as he promises to us today: *"I will not leave you desolate. In a little while you will no longer see me, but then you will see me again! You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you! And you will be my witnesses, in Jerusalem and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth"* (John 14, Acts 1:8)! Amen