



Sermons from Northwood United Church

“A Portion of Your Spirit”

2 Kings 2:1-14

Will Sparks

June 30 2013

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

There is singing going on outside a hospital in Pretoria South Africa today as people gather to show support for the ailing icon of freedom in South Africa, Nelson Mandela. The people call him Tata which means “father,” a term of endearment to a

The generations come and the generations go, and in the process, there is a passing on of values, a rising of key people to leadership and a falling away of others. This was the very situation we read about in our Hebrew Scripture today.

Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. 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. The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you? And he said, Yes, I know; keep silent.

Elijah knows that his time has come... he knows that Elisha can and must stand on his own; he also knows that Elisha does not feel ready. These two have been together as teacher and student- mentor and apprentice for years. They have grown close. Elisha, though skilled and wise still feels small in the shadow of one of the greatest prophets of Israel. Elijah knows that his death will be devastating for Elisha so he invents an excuse to leave Elisha on his own. But Elisha won't have it.... So, to Bethel they go.

Hanging around like thoughtst that won't go away is the company of prophets, reminding Elisha that Elijah will go and that he will have to be the prophet! Elisha does not want to face this possibility and silences them. I recognize and understand."You know Will, you are getting older, you can't abuse our knees like you used to.." "Ya, ya ya, Don't remind me."

Another journey, this one farther than the last.... same results. Elijah said to him, “Elisha, stay here; for the Lord has sent me to Jericho.” But he said, “I will not leave you.” So they came to Jericho. And once again the conscience says “Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?” And he answered, “Yes, I know; be silent.” Again Elijah tries (it starts to become comical)... same results.... this time, on the way it must have been even worse for the young prophet as the old one parts the water with such grace and ease (or so I imagine) just like a real prophet would.....

They both know the game that they are playing. They are talking about everything but the elephant in the room- they both know he will soon die and each skirts the issue. Finally the older prophet confronts the younger: What do you want from me? “Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.” Elisha said, “I just want what you have- a double share of your spirit.” 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.” The older prophet tells the younger.... to be the prophet that I know you can be, you have to face my death. You have to be prepared to stand on your own... (at least that's what I hear)

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. 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. Elisha succeeds Elijah.

With clothes torn in grief Elisha must now, ready or not stand on his own, which is, it seems to me what he was struggling with the whole time. I picture him coming to the river - the same one that Elijah parted with such grace and ease.... and tentatively, carefully, with very little authority, striking the water... not too hard.... and is stunningly, the waters part, and he realises, he has come into his own- he is the prophet now. The torch has been passed.

Do you remember doing something for the first time alone? I remember my first funeral. I was terrified. I lost a lot of sleep. And afterwards as I spoke to my mentor and supervisor at the time I was deeply satisfied. A company of prophets would surely have recognized, “there goes Will. He’s becoming a minister.” Do you remember when you first rode a bicycle without anyone holding it up? It happened for Aidan and me only early last year. I beamed for days. A company of prophets would surely have recognized "There goes Aidan, he can ride a two wheeler!" I understand Elisha..... I am Elisha even as I try to be Elijah with my children...

The mantle of our faith, the mantle of our values is constantly passing on. For us as a Christian community it happens formally as we lay hands on someone and pray for the Spirit to guide them. For you personally you may have someone who has gone before you whose ways you are trying to emulate. For me, the cloud of witnesses, or the communion of saints are ways that I imagine and actually visualize that mantle covering me and providing the wisdom I need that is not of my own making.

Imagine, you are, at any moment, an Elisha – a receiving one – a recipient in the hereditary line of the communion of saints. And you are, at any moment an Elijah a giving one, passing on to someone after you the mantle of your Christian identity, your values, and your spirit.