

2 Kings 2: 1-14

Psalm 77: 1-2, 11-20

Galatians 5: 1, 13-25

Luke 9: 51-62

*These sermon notes were prepared before the sermon was delivered and so do not transcribe the actual sermon word for word*

In a similar pattern to last week, the Old Testament and the gospel have a common theme; they give us two similar narratives from quite different perspectives that invite us to contemplate our own part and place in the Divine story.

And Paul's writing compliments our contemplation with some developed theology to further reflect on our engagement with both the stories in the Scriptures and with our life story.

The readings from Kings and from Luke we can again read in the context of the present. We are a post-Easter community and so are enlightened by all that is revealed in and through Christ.

We are, like the early church seeking to appreciate and realise the reality of resurrection. We are also an Old Testament community, for our fears and doubts mirror those who have yet to fully appreciate the revelation of Christ.

Elijah and Elisha are both on a journey, their lives have direction and movement.

So our first contemplation, our reflection of the Divine narrative is to consider the movement and direction in our own lives, and in the life of this community.

Read through the story a number of times so that you get a real feel for the 'process' that the story narrates. At the same time keep the Easter story in the back of your mind for that is the backdrop, or landscape in which our story makes sense.

Contemplation of the Scriptures takes us beyond the surface reading of the story and so too leads us beyond our surface living into our Divine depth.

What we might then apprehend in the first reading is that this is not a story of Elijah's death and the inheritance passed on to Elisha. For we find that "*the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind*"; this describes Elijah's life orientation rather than a movement toward death, and he is committed to that journey, he lives with that orientation.

So as we continue our contemplation we can reflect on our own 'life orientation' and maybe also become aware of that part of us that does move toward death. We can also begin to discern our commitment; what is your life commitment, what is our life commitment as a church community; and do both become somewhat obscured by the noise of 'other' narratives?

Here we can pause and appreciate the parallel narrative of the gospel reading. Jesus "*set his face to go to Jerusalem*"; he too had an orientation to be 'taken up'. Elijah and Jesus both moving toward higher things, both with an orientation, a life movement, directed beyond the 'worldly gravity' that draws us into death.

The interplay between Elijah and Elisha provides a further dynamic for us to contemplate, and is paralleled in the gospel by the interplay between Jesus, the Samaritans, James and John and the others he encounters on his way.

So Elisha provides us with another perspective and so another focus for our contemplation and it is helpful as we consider the calling that brings us together as Church.

Elisha is a disciple, a follower of Elijah, and so when we look at ourselves in the narrative we might see ourselves as Elishas, but as followers of Jesus rather than Elijah.

The dialogue between Elisha and Elijah then offers us some further insight. Elijah encourages Elisha to know his own place, to know himself and his own journey, "Stay here;" is repeated twice as if to underline this important dialogue. Elisha is not encouraged to follow, rather to stay, to know, or find, his own journey.

As they more fully engage, and as their journey develops Elisha is told that if he sees Elijah ascending, being taken up, then he will inherit that which is his deepest desire, that which he initially sought by following.

And, likewise, we might consider what is our inheritance when we fully appreciate, when we see that which is revealed in and through Christ.

Elisha does see, and he picks up the mantle of Elijah, and then we see him realise the place and the power of Elijah in himself.

For us as Church this is both an important contemplation and a wonderful revelation.

We are not called to be followers of Christ, although that is a valid starting point for our journey. However, if, when, we more fully see what is revealed in the life and person of Christ, then we will also know and realise our true inheritance.

We can read and contemplate the gospel as a parallel narrative, shedding light on the very same process as the Elijah, Elisha story.

In the gospel we hear that Jesus "*set his face to go to Jerusalem*", and that is also our true orientation.

The gospel pushes our contemplation a little further than the Old Testament narrative.

The second half of the gospel narrative seems to be in conflict to the first reading. When Elijah called Elisha to follow him Elisha had his hand on the plow! And his response was to fulfill some obligations to family and community before following.

Elisha needed to bid farewell to his parents before he left his life in the fields to respond to his calling as a prophet. Another thing which Elisha did to affirm and provide closure on his former life was to slaughter the oxen with which he had been plowing in order to feed "the people." [These are references that are taken up in the gospel]

Jesus in the gospel reading suggests that those who do that before following him are somehow less than qualified to follow him. However, as we appreciate the parallel processes that these two stories narrate, we can understand the gospel as underlining an urgency – the process is not so much about following, but rather about living into the inheritance of God sooner than later. The gospel locates the insights of these stories in the now, not in the past nor in the future.

Paul, having contemplated these narratives, explains the same movement to the early Church.

*“For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”*

Another opportunity for reflection as we look at all that inhibits our freedom and look again at all that enslaves us; the pull of ‘worldly gravity’, the self-indulgent gospels of marketing and media spin, our own fears and desire for self-preservation.

Freedom is then summed up in the Divine orientation, *“You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”* Freedom is an orientation to ‘other’ before self, and Paul then encourages us to become aware of all that consumes us and of all that we consume; and he warns us *“take care that you are not consumed by one another”*. Each day 40,000 children are consumed by hunger, or is it greed that consumes them?

The fruit of the spirit is spelled out by Paul, and those still enslaved will find such fruit does not ripen within themselves into a true harvest.

Those who are free, now see there is more perhaps than we initially imagined, for those who are free are enabled to pick up the Divine mantle and continue the activity that has been revealed in Christ.

Most churchgoers never get beyond the first movement in the Elijah, Elisha story.... They start out as followers and when told to stay, they do! Tombstones and brass plaques bear witness to that.

Those who pick up the mantle of Christ, and set their face to Jerusalem, they *have nowhere to lay their head* For they are on a journey into life.

*Peace Be with You*