

Sixth Sunday of Pentecost 26 Jun 2016

[2 Kings 2: 1-14 ; Psalm 77: 1-2, 11-20 ; Galatians 5: 1, 13-25 ; Luke 9:51-62](#) from [Vanderbilt](#)

[Proper 8C / Ordinary 13C / Pentecost +6 June 26, 2016 Textweek](#)

The Old Testament reading, which tells a story of Elijah and Elisha, gives us a primitive, pre-Christian, Easter narrative; the interplay between Elijah and Elisha gives voice to the mystery of dying and rising; and like Easter it invites us into the reality of resurrection.

After hearing that story we are left wondering; it offers no clear comprehension, and yet it seems to address a 'knowing' that we already have somewhere deep within us.

Elijah dies and rises not from a tomb, but rather via "*the chariots of Israel and its horsemen*"; and Elisha also experiences a dying as "*he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces*"; and he then rises to the stature of his master so much so that "*when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other*".

It is very much an Easter or Paschal narrative for it seeks to illuminate the passing over dynamic; the movement that seeks to illustrate for us the activity of God in humanity.

To the Israelites the crossing of the Jordan River on dry land was of tremendous significance; and that is grounded in the book of Joshua:

"This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Gergashites, Amorites and Jebusites. See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the Lord—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap" (Joshua 3:10–13).

It is an affirmation that illustrates the presence of God among humanity, the 'Word made flesh'.

The crossing of the Jordan is the Exodus icon of freedom, new life and of finding a new place in the world; a new place of living in the light of God's presence.

Quite deliberately the parting of the water in the Exodus process also provides a knowing echo with the Divine activity of creation in Genesis

⁹ And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good." [Genesis 1]

The close relationship between Elijah and Elisha, master and disciple, like a father and son; characterises that which is perhaps more fully revealed in the more developed understanding that we find in the relationship between Christ and God.

And the activity; the handing over of Divine activity from Elijah to Elisha, the giving of self; echoes the 'only Son' who was given for all of humanity; and also the handing on of the mantle of enlightenment from Jesus to his followers; "

¹² Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these" [John 14:12].

The writer of this, and the related biblical books of the 'former prophets', was seeking to make sense of changing times and their place and part in the unfolding of creation; they were seeking the enlightenment of faith to bring light into a troubled world.

The books of Kings cover the period from about 850 BC to about 585 BC. During this period, Israel fell to the Assyrians (in 721 BC) and Judah to the Babylonians (586 BC). While these books read like a political history they actually trace the abandonment or renunciation of a religious or political belief or principle.

We also live in changing times, and we too participate in the unfolding of creation, we too are writers of history; and perhaps we also seek to discern an orientation that will glorify the Divine in all of creation.

What we might see in the story of Elijah and Elisha is the part we play as Western democracy buckles under the fear of scarcity and collapses into the foetal position of self-preservation?

What part can we play as we watch the spread of fear around the world? Australia has stopped the boats, Netanyahu in Israel and Trump in America want to build walls, and Britain, once great, has retired back into a past position of 'splendid isolation'.

Do we also follow the path of fear; as we each face death, do we also retreat into a 'clod of ailments' that can only find solace in times past?

Elijah and Elisha identify for us a different path; they illuminate the orientation of Easter, and they empower us toward a fuller more enlightened appreciation of the world.

Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you."

The writer gives voice to the divine question and that's also an invitation for us all to contemplate what it is we seek, what is the future we want to participate in?

Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit."

How does Elisha's response align with the answer we may have?

Elisha serves as an illustration of orientation, a compass for humanity, he wants serve and to give in the same measure and more as his master and teacher; he seeks not for himself but rather for the spirit that will enable him to participate in the unfolding of God in humanity.

Elisha rises above the fear of death; for in Elijah he has seen the reality of resurrection, a perspective that goes beyond the confines of ageing and dying.

If we skip to the gospel we see that same orientation in the compass of Jesus:

"When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem."

It might look like an orientation to the place of death, but at the same time it is an orientation toward the dwelling place of God and beyond death into a future that is no longer bounded by death.

At the first hurdle the disciples respond from a place of fear;

"When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?""

They are unaware of the reality that Jesus seeks to make real.

In setting his face to Jerusalem, we see an orientation toward a completely new reality; it is a reality free of material possessions;

"the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head";

and a reality that reaches toward the future and not to the past, no matter how much the past calls to us;

"Let the dead bury their own dead".

Regardless of how you vote next Saturday and regardless of the result do you believe that the future will change, do we perceive that this is our participation in the unfolding of history?

The compass of Elisha and the compass of Christ point toward an empowered activity that seeks to make manifest the Divine spirit in the unfolding of creation, and that asks more of each of us than a putting a number in a box so someone else can do it for us.

Paul was quite happy living true to his tradition, a life, and a tradition that judged and persecuted others; perhaps his old life followed the compass of the western world.

In opening up to the reality of resurrection he saw the world differently;

for freedom Christ has set us free.... only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.

As we, each and all, seek to give of ourselves, we do make a real difference, our life changes, and so too our world changes. So as we contemplate who we are going to vote for let's remember two election slogans that are illustrated today;

Be the change you want to see, and for things to change, first I must change.

Peter Humphris