

*God's work continues.* The final sermon on Elijah in a series preached August 2018. Preached on August 26, 2018 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lesons: II KINGS 2:1-15

I CORINTHIANS 3:1-11

Aging can be a great teacher – despite some of the physical and emotional and downright inconvenient or painful realities that go with growing older.

But how often do each of us find ourselves saying,  
“I wish I had known this, seen better that 20 or 30  
years or more ago

And we say it, not in a regretful or maudlin way

Rather we say it as an admission that in some ways  
we now know better,

See things from a broader perspective than we did  
in “them times”

As we begin to reflect upon the first portion of  
II Kings 2 which Joan read moments ago,

Elijah has seen the death of Jezebel and Ahab.

In his later years, Elijah is given a time of  
comparative calm in which to entrust to others what  
God had entrusted to him many years ago.

Rather than sitting around, zoned out and binge  
watching a Biblical equivalent of Netflix with a  
bowl of salty snacks handy,

Elijah had begun to establish what is referred to as a “company of prophets” (vs3)

Schools established at Bethel, Gilgal and Jericho.

The young men who attended these schools were taught by Elijah in the ways of God

Like an abbot of a medieval monastery, Elijah was their father (Icings 2:12).

We are further told that Elisha was one of the community. Their relationship went all the way back to Sinai.

How exciting that would have been for this company.

To hear, to listen to firsthand accounts of Elijah’s life

To ask questions of Elijah about his experiences – some of which we have reflected upon in these past weeks.

To hear Elijah say with firmness – this is what God did in my life – I wonder what He will do in yours

I wonder what adventures and experiences of the Living Lord await each of you.

And it would not be teaching in the form of ‘I talk-you listen’

I believe the teaching would have been more dialogical.

Questions asked – stories and experiences of each and all shared

I think one of the reminders from this morning's reading from II Kings is that *old saints never outlive their usefulness*

There is no Biblical equivalent to Freedom 55 in the Godly life.

Retirement as a concept we hear a lot about today is not in scripture

God sends his servants out into the marketplace even in the 11<sup>th</sup> hour

Service can still be rendered,

Battles are still fought

Victories are still won.

Even when we are old we can still declare as Elijah did – God's power

*Getting old does not mean becoming obsolete*

It can and often does mean – growing in the faith,

Maturing in the faith

Serving, ministering, venturing – enjoying

ourselves in the presence of God to the end of our days

Reading this morning's portion of II Kings I believe to idle away our older years as God's people is to rob ourselves of the good years – AND to rob the church of one of the choicest gifts that God has given to enrich us.

Even when we are old and when we have or not so little aches and pains,

We can **STILL** declare God's power and might...**to all the generations to come (Ps.71:18)**

It is quite true that as we age, we may not have the energy or inclination for leadership, but HEAR ME – we are an invaluable asset to the next generation.

No one, particularly one who professes to be a Christian should ever be seen or treated as if they have outlived their usefulness by God.

Last week a Facebook posting on my site told of how 90+ years former President Jimmy Carter still lives a simple and basic life in Plains, Georgia – doing what he has always done – helping others!

He still leads a bible class at his church  
Just think what it would be like to sit in on one of those classes.

How much you would learn and how great the experience to listen to others in the class.

For even in his most recent book, Faith: a Journey for all, it is clear that the former President still has much to remind us about living as a follower of Jesus today.

I reflect on my own ministry and I treasure and have benefitted so much from senior colleagues and more senior parishioners.

They taught me so much in my formative years of parish work.

And I find that the lessons that they taught, I am now sharing with others – almost without realizing it

Things about preaching, handling difficult people  
 in a congregation,  
 Listening in a non-judgmental and long perspective  
 way,  
 Prayer  
 Balance in life.

*There comes a time in each of our lives when  
 our greatest usefulness is passing on our understanding  
 to others-*

- *Understanding about the Christian faith*
- *Understanding about how God has and continues  
 to touch our lives in ways that we can touch others*
- *Understanding about time, waiting, what's really  
 important in our lives*
- *Understanding the real source of hope, peace and  
 contentment.*

That leads to a second reminder from this  
 morning's texts-

*God's work has to be done – but it does not have to be  
 done by us.*

At Sinai, God gives Elijah 3 assignments:

- to anoint Hazael king of Syria
- Jehu, king of Israel
- Elisha as his prophetic successor

Of the 3 final jobs God gave Elijah, Elijah only got  
 around to the last one: the calling of Elisha.

The other tasks were accomplished by Elisha,  
 after Elijah's departure

Does that mean Elijah failed God?

NO – it only means the plans and purposes of God are not limited by earthly lives and time

Mid way through our time in New Brunswick in Sackville and Port Elgin,

I wrote to my predecessor, expressing my continuing thanks for all the work he had done in his time there as minister.

To that point, I had never met him – I have since on more than one occasion.

His was a very different ministry and style than mine came to be.

But I recognized very early on his diligent and faithful to God service.

I wrote to him not expecting a reply, but delighted when I received one.

He began his letter by acknowledging my words of appreciation and thankfulness

He then detailed some of the positive things he had heard about my work.

He finished off by citing a portion of this morning's reading from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians

**I [Paul] planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only who God gives the growth [I Cor.3:6-7]**

For me it was one of those aha moments in parish ministry.

No leader – lay or ordained – is responsible to do everything in a parish.

It all does not depend upon one person

We are called to be faithful, obedient and sensitive to the voice of God's prompting, leading, mercy and grace

But we are NOT the centre

The fulfillment and realization of the coming of God's kingdom DOES NOT DEPEND solely upon us.

Elijah and St. Paul were mortal. They recognized their limitations.

Do we, in positions of leadership within a faith community?

Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, now the Overseas Missionary Fellowship looms large in Church mission history – especially for his work in China at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the last century

CIM missionaries were real tough cookies in terms of faithfulness and holding to the cause of Christ under persecution.

And in so many cases, they passed this on to their children...

At one point Hudson Taylor said, *God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's provision.*

Though initially spoken in the context of financial provision for the work,

I like to think Taylor meant provision in a broader sense as well – provision of human resources to continue God's work.

This being the case, the operative words are *God's work done in God's way.*

God is faithful

His plans and purposes will be realized – if not immediately, that's okay.

If not by us – that's okay too – even if it is difficult to believe this is the case.

We want to accomplish to the best of our ability what we believe God is calling us to do – in whatever area we are serving.

But for any number of reasons, we have to realize that we may not see the final resolution or fulfillment.

Know, hear, inwardly digest that God is FAITHFUL. God's plans and purposes will not be side barred or marginalized.

**I [Paul] planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only who God gives the growth [I Cor.3:6-7]**

A final reminder from this very rich and wonderful story is that *Elisha saw firsthand and very clearly the invisible host of God.*

Why only Elisha and not the whole community of prophets is a topic for another time

As is his request for a double share of Elijah's experience with God.

What I want us to consider this morning is what Elisha sees walking with Elijah

This is what commentators technically call the translation of Elijah.

It happens only twice in Scripture – here in II Kings with Elijah

The other is to a pre-Flood patriarch named Enoch (Hebrews 11:5)

Neither Elijah nor Enoch experience death as we know it – they are taken up by God.

In the life of Elijah which has already witnessed so clearly and greatly the presence and power of God – perhaps it is not surprising Elijah's leave taking of this earth would be very dramatic. However,

There is a witness to what happens – Elisha.

Elisha sees a chariot of fire and horses take Elijah upon in a whirlwind.

**Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen**

Elisha saw the visible hosts of God.

This conditioned him to put his eyes not only on

what he could see in the here and now – this world

But to never lose sight of the world that may not be

visible, but is always there – a spiritual world all

around us.

A spiritual world addressed in many places in the Psalms and in words of power and assurance in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews.

**12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely,<sup>[a]</sup> and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of<sup>[b]</sup> the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.**

Amen!

Now let us not get all silly and superstitious about this text or the one in II Kings.

The specifics of what Elisha saw were needful for him at that moment.

Our experiences of what Celtic Christians termed 'thin places' – where God is particularly close, Where the worlds of the visible here and now and the invisible meld are and will be specific for us. Of this other realm or reality we need to be in no doubt. It exists!

We just have to have the eyes to see and the expectation and hope that comes from faith.

For is this not a key factor in faith – the capacity to look beyond the seen to the unseen world of reality,

## Where the invisible God is also at work?

To live with the conviction that God is at work in the here and NOW and in this unseen world to accomplish his plans and purposes.

To come back to the Letter to the Hebrews

**11 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. <sup>2</sup> Indeed, by faith<sup>[a]</sup> our ancestors received approval. <sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.<sup>[b]</sup>**

Such 'thin place' experiences were not given to

Elisha and they are not given to us so we can be arrogant, self-righteous and judgmental with those who have yet to have such experiences

Nor do such experiences make us wiser or give us a sense that we are better than others.

On the contrary,

Experiencing 'thin places' in our lives make us more humble

And convict us that we really do not know as much as we might pride fully think we do

God causes such 'thin places' to be part of our lives for encouragement, strength, hope, perspective and to remind us that we are never alone in living out the Christian.

There is this cloud of witnesses

And there is God's promise that he is with us.  
He is always with us – to do for each of us what he  
has done for others in the past.

And THAT is something we can never hear too  
often in this very uncertain, often chaotic and  
frequently unfair world in which we live. AMEN