

Letting Life Lead
June 30, 2013
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All right... so, true or false?

(We're gonna do a little interactive thing for a second,
so please just yell out one of those when the answer comes to mind.)

God is good.

[true.] (easy one)

We live in the *love* of God.

[true]

God is a temporary thing. Something that exists one second, and is gone the next.

[false]

God is a part of our lives.

[true]

We are a part of God's life.

[true]

We are no longer a part of God's life when we're at our lowest,
so God leaves us alone.

[false]

Being God's own, God guides us through all days.

[true]

“...Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.”

...That one wasn't a question. That's a reading from Deuteronomy, chapter 31, verse 6.

And it's one of the most important truths we can ever know in our souls.

How do we interact with God in this life?

How do we trust God?

And how do we feel ourselves being moved along as we go, by God's guidance?

Even when everything else falls away---when everything else ends or changes?

These are all questions our scripture readings ask of us, today.

We look into 2 Kings (a rare Hebrew Bible pick we a lot of times don't get to read!)

Elijah, and Elisha. God's called prophets... Walking together.

Elisha, Elijah's follower---his student, his pupil, his mentee---

---is about to be left off in the world to continue in God's call on his own.

---Elijah's face and guidance no longer beside him.

Does he question whether or not he'll be alone?

In our reading from Luke, Jesus is walking along. On his way to Jerusalem.

With each step, moving closer and closer to God's call---

---following God's lead---in his own life.

...Putting aside the disciples' really strange and violent question to Jesus

about whether or not they should ask God to set Jesus' opponents on fire...

(---did anyone else find that odd?)

[maybe not for Old Testament, but for New Testament---*ugh*]

Seemed Jesus did, too. His answer? *Nooooo...?*

Text gives a simple statement: He rebuked the disciples for what they'd said, and walked on.

---Anyway, between all of this, Jesus is stepping through the dirt from town to town, and he meets up with all of these folks along the way.

All of 'em talkin' up the fact that they're ready to do what he does.

That they want to go where he goes.

And what does Jesus find in them all?

Hesitation, right? A clinging to the past.

A sense of confinement in their already set-lives and schedules, keeping them from following Jesus further down the road.

There's a message in both of these moments for us.

What is it?

What's the question it leaves in our minds, about our lives with God, and the ways we live with God, each day we're here?

Something to think about together.

Each morning we wake up, we're interacting with God

whether we take the time to notice or not.

Everything we touch, everything we see, everything we feel...each *face* in our eyes...

...it's all a part of God.

---All of the things that move us. All of those things *we move ourselves*...

...those are all actions *inside* the soul of God,

Either led by the love we connect with, in God's Spirit; or by a darker urge,

Which brings damage and destruction to the life of the Whole.

...How do we follow God's lead?

In our lives, God calls us constantly.

God speaks into our souls, and is there to guide us and love us through each step we take.

And the beautiful thing about the way we've been created here...

...in this one particular moment in eternity...

...is that God put us together in such a way that we're able to *choose*

—moment by moment--- whether or not we'll follow God,

whether or not we listen to the sounds God creates in our lives,

and let ourselves feel God's love in our heart and spread it out from there...

...or turn away to *pretend* to be on our own.

Pretend to be *abandoned*, and let our lives grow cold.

Let's read our scripture again from 2 Kings.

(2 Kings 2) 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 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. 3 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." 4 Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. 5 The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent." 6 Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. 7 Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. 8 Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground. 9 When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." 10 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." 11 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. 12 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. 13 He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. 14 He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, saying, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

This passage shows more than one amazing act of commitment and faith
on the part of Elisha.

You can see pretty clearly his utter sense of need
to stay by the side of Elijah until the very end.

That one face that guided him and showed him
the strength of the power of God, moving through world.

That one face that helped give him a sense of himself in life.

[---He doesn't want to leave him, no matter how far he goes.

The other prophets come up to him, saying stuff that should bring some fear
and nervousness to Elisha's heart.

---Poking a sensitive spot, reminding him of what he already knew...

... that his mentor was leaving him, and he'd be on his own.

But what does Elisha do in all of this?

Does he become consumed by that fear? Does he hesitate once, to keep going?

Does Elisha pretend for one second, that he'll now be on his own?

No. He still follows. He keeps going.

He doesn't let whatever hesitation might come to mind

at the thought of things changing,

Change his choice to stick with the call of God in front of him, and continue on.

Even as the things he once knew, were coming to an end, he keeps walking.

Because he knows something to be true in his heart.

He knows that though things have changed---though Elijah is gone---God is still with him.

---And I love that last moment.

That moment when Elisha is standing there, after watching Elijah go away,

He picks up that Mantle---Elijah's cloak and symbol of authority---

---and he strikes the water, just as Elijah had done before him...

And he says a beautiful thing:

"Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?"

And boom(!)---the water parts to one side and to the other,

And he steps across, and walks on.

Gives me goosebumps.

It sends a rush down my skin to read,

because it's such an amazing act of faith and fulfillment... right there.

So fast. So soon. With such surety on both ends.

Okay, but why?

Elisha, after all, asks that question, "Where is the Lord, the God of Elisha?"

But, friends, don't take it as questioning, just because it's followed by a question mark.

All of the text surrounding that moment make it clear

that those words Elisha speaks there at the side of the river,

form a *rhetorical* statement. And to me, that's what gives the words their power.

Elisha knows darn well where God is. Right there. All around him.

He knows in that moment, and in all moments to come,

God is right there, with him.

And he strikes that water with Elijah's cloak...

...and watches God continue working in his life,

Even when that life no longer resembles what it used to be.

How do we follow God's lead?

How do we keep walking on, with that faith in Elisha, each day we go?

Our *lectionary* actually asked us to think about this, but I loved it,

Because it applies so intimately to us all...

So often we become discouraged.

Overwhelmed with a sense of doubt and fear as our lives inevitably change around us.

Like Elisha with Elijah, we feel ourselves moved and motivated

by the presence of other people we hold dear as we go along..

...people we feel help bring us closer to God, and keep us connected strong.

---Whether that's a spiritual mentor, or a fellow congregant, or a friend, or a spouse, or a parent---

...and as all of those faces come and go, as our lives keep changing,

We're left with a *choice*.

As each face through the years falls away into memory,

do we let *ourselves* fall away, believing we've been abandoned?

...Or do we keep going? Do we keep walking?

Trusting God's call—God's lead---knowing where God is, like Elisha---

---right here, with us----as we step ahead and ahead again.

As this Deer Park congregation, this question's come to you a lot, I know---

---As pastors have changed here, over the years. As people have come and gone,

...Some past faces going, some new faces coming.

In the years I've been here, I've seen it myself;

and I know in the years you were all here before me,

You saw even more of it, as time moved on.

That question---the choice---showed up a lot, in my own experience, this past weekend,

while I was in Boston for my older brother's wedding.

Though it was a time of celebration, it was also a time of mourning for some of us.

Particularly for my parents.

June---to my mom---is now felt by her, as the “month of abandonment.”

That exact title.

She lost both of her parents---my grandparents—

---in June, and this was also the month my older brother

first moved off to Massachusetts, last year.

So as we were all celebrating Ted and Gabrielle’s love together,

there was a lot of nurturing and comforting us siblings had to do for our folks;

And a lot of processing we had to do, ourselves---all three of us very close in heart---

---knowing that all of this change with Ted being gone

had been sort of finally set in stone,

And as close as we are, that we would now have to move on with our lives,

living so far away from each other.

I remember that last moment with Ted, my older brother,

as we said goodbye, that last night.

I remember the rest of the family walking in through the hotel doors.

But I lingered.

And Ted lingered too.

He just stared at me, with a sad smile, as I stood at that rotating glass.

And I looked back at him, too,

knowing I wouldn’t see that face that meant so much to me---

---that company of his life that always gave me a stronger sense of myself in the world---
for a long while.

I smiled back at him, and pushed into the door.

Do we stop, or do we keep going?

To me, that question is just as rhetorical as Elisha's question right there, by that river.

Of course, we keep stepping.

We take that mantle that's been passed to us by those we love and hold dear,
and we strike the water, and walk on.

Continuing to walk toward that sound of God speaking---calling—in our lives.

And we do it, because we live with that faith in our hearts that tells us:

Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who
goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.

[We do it because we know it's *true* that God is with us,
and that it's *false* that we're ever on our own.]

We follow God's lead, by following those urgings we read from Jesus,
in the gospel of Luke, telling us to let the old things pass on as they should,

And to keep your mind and your heart with God
as you move ahead down that path before you.

...Because that's all that's ever surrounded you, to begin with.

...We choose to keep moving forward in the life of God,
Because though different lives--different moments--come and go in our view,
It's always the life of God working through each one of those,
to bring you where you should be.

And in being a part of God's life, God will never abandon you, or leave you alone;
But continue holding you, and guiding you along, every day as you go.

As we close up today, let's keep in our hearts----way down deep---

That faith of Elisha as he stepped across that river.

As Life leads you on, don't hesitate to go. Because you go always with God.

...“Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?”

Right here with you. ...Leading you step by step in God's holy love, forever. Amen.