

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park and Faith Family

Title: Do you really want to follow me?

Lesson: 2 Kings 2:1-12; Mark 9:2-9

2Kings 2:1-12

¹Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ²Elijah 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. ³The 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."

⁴Elijah 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. ⁵The 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."

⁶Then 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. ⁷Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. ⁸Then 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.

⁹When 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." ¹⁰He 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." ¹¹As 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. ¹²Elisha 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.

Mark 9:2-9

²Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" ⁸Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. ⁹As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Today is the last Sunday of the Epiphany and Transfiguration Sunday. When we remember the baptism of Jesus at the beginning of Epiphany, we remember the transfiguration of Jesus at the last Sunday of the Epiphany. And, from this Wednesday, Lent begins. If the Epiphany is the season of light, Lent is the season of Ash. Most Christians focus on a relationship with God, growing as disciples and extending ourselves, often choosing to give up something or to volunteer and give of ourselves for others during Lent. I hope and pray that you will get ready for this Lent.

According to today's gospel lesson, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain where they were alone. And he was transfigured before them. (2) Jesus already told his disciples about the suffering he would encounter in Jerusalem, but they didn't understand his suffering and his predestinated death. Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain must have been intended to give some enlightenment to his disciples.

In the Bible, mountains are often described as glorious places. In the Old Testament, God brought prophets to the mountains. Moses experienced the light of glory in the mount Sinai. And, the place that he received the Ten Commandments was also Mount Sinai. Prophet Elijah experienced the glory of God on Mount Horeb. Likewise, in the Bible, mountains mean the place of glory.

On the high mountain, while Jesus was praying, he was transfigured before his disciples, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. (3) More surprising things happened. There appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. (4) Gospel Luke describes in detail what they were talking about. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem. (Luke 9:31, NRSV) Here, his departure means death.

Scholars say that the term 'departure' is a translation of Exodus, which is in Greek. So, Jesus was talking with Moses and Elijah about Exodus, which means God's new way for salvation beyond death. To be specific about Jesus' death, it means the suffering of Jesus on the cross in Jerusalem. The case of Jesus' cross is often compared to the Exodus. Jesus leads us through the cross to the new way for salvation such as Moses' Exodus. Before we join in Jesus' suffering for 40 days, I hope you will choose a Bible chapter or verses to meditate on.

Elijah was one of the people talking with Jesus on the mountain. 2 Kings 2 describes Elijah's departure. He didn't die but ascended to heaven. He is remembered by the Israelites as a great prophet, so his name is often mentioned in the Bible. When he was with Elisha and he went to Bethel and went to Jericho and went to Jordan, he told Elisha, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to..." (2 Kings 2:2, 4, 6) But, Elisha's answer was always the same: "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." (2, 4, 6)

In fact, Elijah's words: "Stay here..." was irony. The true meaning hidden was "Do you really want to follow me?," and "Do you really want to live as my disciple?" Elijah's words: Stay here three times was the process of confirming Elisha's resolution. After they crossed the Jordan, finally, Elijah confirmed him as his successor.

When 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." (9) Elisha asked a double share of Elijah's spirit and he continued Elijah's remaining mission. Successors are those who continue their mentor's mission and try to inherit not only glory but also suffering.

The relationship between Elijah and Elisha is a good example of 'Followership.' Followership is as important as leadership. What the Bible emphasizes is not leaders, but the way of followers and disciples. The last scene of today's scripture lesson is remarkably interesting. 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. (11) Although Elisha couldn't see and meet Elijah again, Elijah's remaining mission continued through Elisha and his disciples.

Let's go back to the gospel lesson. When Peter saw Jesus' transfiguration and Moses and Elijah, he was very surprised. He wanted to capture the amazing scene, so he said that "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." (5) When he was in such a fantasy, Jesus told his disciples to go down the mountain. Jesus already knew what would happen to him when they would go to Jerusalem, but he wanted to go there to fulfill God's will. And he will ask his disciples, "Do you really want to follow me?," "Do you really want to be my disciple?" just as Elijah asked Elisha three times. Beloved, if Jesus asks you like that "Do you really want to follow me?,"

“Do you really want to be my disciple?” what would you answer? I hope and pray that you will find the answer during the coming forty days.