

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14

^{2:1} 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.

^{2:6} 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.

Commentary

This passage narrates the ascent of Elijah and the commissioning of Elisha, two great prophets. Elijah, who raised a child from the dead and triumphed over the priests of Ba'al, makes way for his disciple, Elisha, who would prophesy through the reigns of four kings of Israel (850-800 B.C.). His name means "El [God] is salvation." Elisha asked Elijah for "a double share of your spirit." Ancient peoples believed that God-given charismatic gifts could be apportioned out and transferred to others, as when God gave some of Moses' spirit to the seventy elders in the

wilderness (Num 11:16-17). This memory had great meaning for this moment of passing the mantle to the next generation. Elijah finally left, and when he did, Elisha tore his clothes in a sign of mourning. Elisha picked up Elijah's discarded mantle and struck the water with it, saying, "Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" This act represented evidence that he was Elijah's successor.

Reflection

A common theme for this passage is how remembering God's actions can help us through difficult times. When has the memory of God's actions comforted you?

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

^{5:1} For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

^{5:13} For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. ¹⁴ For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. ¹⁶ Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Commentary

Conditioned by sex-saturated media, Americans often presume Paul meant sexual desire when he used the word "flesh." In fact, Paul understood flesh in a much larger sense—any self-seeking human desire was opposed to God's intention for our lives. Paul's list of vices in 5:19-21 includes eight sins against community unity: enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, and envy. Paul compared the Galatians to dogs who snap and bite each other (5:15). The way of life guided by the Spirit, on the other hand, is characterized by other virtues. Paul said eventually that the Galatians were free, but paradoxically he also told them to "become slaves of one another" through love. Mutual love was their only obligation, just as Christ had said.

Reflection

Give contemporary examples of “fleshly” behavior. (Be sure your definition and examples go beyond sexual sins.) How do they affect the unity of your church, family, or workplace? How do they affect you?

Luke 9:51-62

^{9:51} When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. ⁵² And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; ⁵³ but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ 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?" ⁵⁵ But he turned and rebuked them. ⁵⁶ Then they went on to another village. ⁵⁷ As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." ⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." ⁵⁹ To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." ⁶⁰ But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." ⁶¹ Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." ⁶² Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Commentary

When Jesus was rejected, the disciples were incensed—particularly James and John, two of the disciples closest to Jesus. They wanted to call down lightning from God to destroy the whole village, as Elijah had invoked fire from above on the soldiers of Ahaziah. Jesus rebuked their eagerness to employ destructive behavior on his behalf. Jesus’ refusal to seek vengeance on those who rejected him foreshadows the Passion of Christ—this is the way of our faith. When three would-be disciples came to Jesus, he warned them of the cost of following him. They would be homeless; and they would have to put loyalty to Jesus above everything else, even their families. Jesus demanded more of them than Elijah had asked of Elisha, who was at least given permission to say goodbye to his family (1 Kings 19). In response to this story, we are called to “count the cost” of our faith and contemplate the barriers to our complete commitment.

Reflection

How can we stay in relationship to those who hurt us? Should we?

- 77:1 I cry aloud to God,
aloud to God, that he may hear me.
- ² In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord;
in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying;
my soul refuses to be comforted.**
- ¹¹ I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD;
I will remember your wonders of old.
- ¹² I will meditate on all your work,
and muse on your mighty deeds.**
- ¹³ Your way, O God, is holy.
What god is so great as our God?
- ¹⁴ You are the God who works wonders;
you have displayed your might among the peoples.
- ¹⁵ With your strong arm you redeemed your people,
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.**
- ¹⁶ When the waters saw you, O God,
when the waters saw you, they were afraid;
the very deep trembled.
- ¹⁷ The clouds poured out water;
the skies thundered;
your arrows flashed on every side.**
- ¹⁸ The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind;
your lightnings lit up the world;
the earth trembled and shook.
- ¹⁹ Your way was through the sea,
your path, through the mighty waters;
yet your footprints were unseen.
- ²⁰ You led your people like a flock
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.**

Closing Prayer

Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.