



Season of Lay Ministries

Second Sunday after Trinity

26 June

Preaching notes

Readings

2 Kings 2: 1-2; 6-14

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Luke 9: 51-end

Think back to when you last took on a new role – either paid or voluntary. Can you remember what you did? We often take care when seeking a new role, whether it is our full-time job or a ministry in the church. And rightly so, since both paid work and volunteer roles require time and energy. We give of ourselves in the service of others and so it is important to be doing the right thing.

In our reading from 2 Kings we hear how Elisha is selected for the role as chief prophet in Israel. He had served for some time as Elijah's assistant. After Elijah had his showdown with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, he found himself feeling very low and when God spoke to him he complained that he was alone in serving God, and was on the point of giving up. God met him, and sent him to Horeb, where he came to Elijah, not in the whirlwind, or the earthquake, but the whisper of a voice. Have you heard that voice, a whisper inside that says you are on the right track, even when outside it doesn't seem like it?

Well, that voice whispered something to Elijah. He was called to anoint new kings for Aram and Israel and to anoint a new assistant as a prophet, Elisha. God had heard that Elijah was at his wits' end and gave him a helper.

As Elijah's assistant, Elisha had seen what the role involved. He had seen how the king of Israel, when he was being obedient to God, did not go into battle without consulting the prophet. The prophet played a vital part in the politics of Israel. Since Israel believed that God was on their side, and gave them the authority to kill their enemies, they had to be

sure that God was really calling them to this battle. The king on his own was not enough; the prophet was to be consulted. And when Ahab consulted Elijah, sure enough he won. When he ignored a prophet's advice he got killed.

So, this is the job Elisha has been prepared for. But it is a strange selection process. He is not even shown praying about it, but charging around certain of what he must do. Elijah tells him to stay behind as he moves on yet Elisha sticks to him, closer than the best football marker. First to Bethel, then to Jericho, and then across the Jordan out of Israel, into the area where that great prophet Moses died. Elijah was going to the right place to finish his work on earth, and Elisha wanted to be with him just as Joshua had been the last person to see Moses before he died.

Seeing Elisha's persistence, Elijah knows that Elisha is sensing that he is called to continue Elijah's work, and so he asks Elisha what he wants. Elisha replies, "to inherit a double portion of your Spirit".

In this he is referring to the way in which the chief heir of an Israelite, usually his eldest son, got a double portion of the inheritance and the others a lesser amount. That meant he could carry on the farming work of his father fully since he had enough of the land to work to support his family in turn. So, Elisha is asking for a double portion of Elijah's ability to hear and see God and to know what he wants for Israel. By asking for this he is asking to be seen as Elijah's heir, as his spiritual son. But this would be presumptive if God hadn't first chosen him.

To help Elisha be sure that he is really chosen by God for this role, Elijah gives Elisha a test. If he sees Elijah being taken, if he can see God at work in that, then he has indeed received God's Spirit, and he can know for sure God will be with him and using him.

And so it is, that Elisha sees the unknowable – he sees Elijah taken up in the whirlwind to God. He also sees the chariots and horsemen of Israel.

By the fact that he can see them he knows he is now the prophet in Israel, he has got the job. Quite some acceptance letter!

Filled with confidence from this, he takes up Elijah's mantle – his cloak – and goes back to the Jordan. Just as Moses knew God would part it for him, and Elijah had known only hours earlier, so now Elisha calls on God and God answers – he is affirmed as the prophet whom God has raised up as Moses' successor for those times.

This is a great story of a man who knows he is called by God and is willing to do whatever he must to take on the role he is called to. But what can we learn of this for ourselves?

The first is that God does call us to serve him, and will let us know how. It may not be through the drama of being anointed as Elisha was, but there will be something. For most of us God speaks as he spoke to Elijah, in that quiet, echo of a whisper, in the inner hunch that gives peace. As we sense we have heard God, we test our ideas with others we trust and the sense of God's purpose for us grows. Be it to teach, to be a quality manager, or an environmental scientist, or to voluntary roles through which we can serve God and the world, God calls us to serve him in many ways, to play our part in making this world more holy, more in touch with him. God even guides us through that usual interview process, and a job suddenly opens up and we take it.

We can check out what we are hearing from God with others. Just as the kings of Israel knew they might be mistaken if they made a decision on their own, we too can go to others to discuss what we think we are hearing from God. God often speaks through the good advice of others.

The second is that God comes to us to help us as he calls us to serve him. At our baptism and confirmation we were assured that we have the Holy Spirit of God with us. This is the Spirit which Paul tells us about in our reading from Galatians. As we are open to God, praying and obediently acting in the ways he calls us to we experience the fruits of the Spirit in our lives. What better way to know you are in the right place for God than to become more aware of his love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control growing in you. What amazing gifts to experience for ourselves, and for others to enjoy!

As we continue to explore what God has for us to do,

we listen for his voice within, we listen to his voice through others who know him, and we look to see more of the fruits of his presence in our lives. Then we can have confidence with Elisha that the God in Israel has called us and is with us.

*The Venerable Moira Astin
Archdeacon of Reigate*

Prayer

Lord Jesus,
you call us to follow you,
to walk away from other demands
and to focus on you.
Help us as we minister in your name
to understand your call,
to respond fully,
to put our hand to the plough
and not look back;
and when we fail
to know that you forgive.

Amen.

*The Very Revd Andrew Nunn
Dean of Southwark*

Suggested hymns

All that I am, all that I do
Forth in the peace of Christ we go
Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go
God it was who said to Abraham (Wild Goose)
Into your hands (Hillsong)
Let us talents and tongues employ
More like Jesus (Kristian Stanfill)
On Earth as it is in Heaven (Chris McClarney)
Thuma mina (Send me Lord)