



The Westminster Pulpit

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“Moving On” **Sermon on 2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14**

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To be ordained as a minister of Word and Sacrament in our denomination, you have to explain your calling. “Tell us about your call!” “Tell us about your call!” “Tell us about your call!” You have to tell about your call until they believe it, or you do. The call!

Once upon a time, a man named Jesus yelled out to some fellas in a boat, “Follow me! And I will make you fish for people.”

Once upon a time, a fella named Saul got knocked off his donkey on the road to Damascus, and “Suddenly! If anyone is in Christ, a new creation! Paul!”

Once upon a time, Isaiah had a calling in the temple: “Holy, holy, holy! I saw God high and lifted up!”

Once upon a time, Jeremiah had a calling that was before he was even in the womb. Jeremiah was a Presbyterian because that’s predestination.

Elijah, well, we don’t know where or when he was called. Elijah just showed up out of nowhere. No one asked Elijah about his call. Elijah didn’t have to prove his call; his life was authority enough. He had the authority to visit the king. It wasn’t that he had money or played politics that got him to the door.

“You’re ruining this country. You’ve married a foreigner. You are desecrating the Promised Land with temples to other gods. And as a result, there’s going to be a drought.”

And there was a drought. No one asked Elijah, “Tell us about your call.” His life was evidence enough! We don’t know when or where he was called. He just blew onto the scene.

And “The wind blows where it pleases. You hear the sound of it, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes. So it is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Jesus said that he could have been talking about Elijah.

Elijah could pray fire down from heaven. He could pray for the rain and the drought was over. Who is this that the wind and the RAIN obey him? Elijah! A man of God! He just blew in out of nowhere... and today the wind is going to take him away.

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14

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

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

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.” 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.” 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. 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.

He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. 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.

Now that’s the way to make an exit from ministry! That’s a pastor’s dream. A true confirmation of a call! Drop the mic, head out the front door, your fiery chariot awaits! Woosh! Up! Up! Up into the heavens!

Good luck finding a pastor to follow that. Can you imagine that poor Pastor Nominating Committee? Having to answer the prospect’s question? “Tell me, under what circumstances did your last pastor leave?” “Well, there was this Fiery chariot that flew down, and he just left in a God-given whirlwind.” Well, the search for the next pastor will continue, there ain’t nobody who wants to follow that!

Unfortunately, a whirlwind exit never happens for us pastor-types. The exit doesn't happen after the benediction. It doesn't happen after the celebration lunch! It's a celebration for those sad to see the pastor go! Celebration for those happy to see the pastor go!

But - the exit, the exit, the real exit - is a long walk to the last car in the parking lot, robe over the shoulder, a cardboard box in hand, holding whatever was left of the office. Throw it in the back. One last look at the church. Anyone can follow that!

Most of us leave this earth not with a bang, but with a whimper! And life moves on.

This is all to say, Elijah was one of a kind. Abraham was the father of the children of Israel; he died. Moses led the people out of the land of Egypt; he died. Elijah never died! He flew off, living and breathing, into the heavens! Fire and wind! How do you follow that?

That's what Elisha wanted to know. He should know. Elisha spent a career following Elijah. Followed him wherever he went. That's not a bad calling - to be a follower. You don't make the same money, but you don't have the stress. You don't have to lead when you're a follower. When there's a dead end, as a follower, no one looks at you to figure it out. Don't ask me? It's above my pay grade!

At the dead end, Elijah took off his mantle, touched the water, and the river parted. Probably flooded a lot of property upstream, and made taking a bath downstream interesting. But, for Elisha, no problem. He just followed.

No stress for a follower, until you realize you're the one who is called to take the lead. You hear it in Elisha's voice.

Elijah keeps saying, "Stay here! I have to be going." And Elisha keeps saying, "I'm not going to leave you."

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I remember being in the ICU in Morganton. And Grace Villars is telling her husband, Olin, of 60 years, "Don't you leave me!" "Don't you leave me!" And every time she said, "Don't you leave me!," you could see Olin's vital signs pick up. The heart rate improved. The oxygen-up. And then back down. And this went on, her hand in his, and then she said, "If you have to leave, I'll be okay. I love you!" And then she kissed him, and he was gone—closest thing to a fiery chariot I've ever seen.

Where there were two. Now one. Two coffee cups in the morning. Now one. Two on the sofa watching the news. Now one. Two at the kitchen table, now one. Two in the bed. Now one. "I'm glad he went first. I wouldn't want him to suffer this heartache." Taking the pain. Taking the lead.

Life is filled with necessary losses. Transitions. When dreams crash and you have to start over. When you lose your job, "Now what?" When it's time to end a career. And a heartbeat later, "Dad, we don't want you driving anymore." When my parents died, "Who do I go to now?"

Taking the lead!

Elijah said, "Anything you need before I go?" Elisha said, "Before you go, Elijah, I need a double share of your Spirit!" Whatever you have, I don't. Then there was a wind. And then there were chariots of fire. And then Elisha could no longer see them. And then there was one.

Elisha tore his clothes in grief.

Time should stop when someone goes. The traffic rumbles without respect. The children play and laugh. There's a parade downtown. Life continues. Elisha wiped his eyes and picked up the mantle that fell from the sky.

How do you follow Elijah? You don't. You follow the GOD of Elijah.

"Where is the Lord of Elijah?" And he struck the water, and the water parted in two just like it did for Elijah! Just like it did for Joshua. Just like it did for Moses.

It's what we believe! The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of God stands forever. The more things change, there's one thing that doesn't change!

The more things change... and man, the times are a-changin' so fast! You can't even tell what's real anymore. People are like sheep without a shepherd.

Who's going to lead? Suddenly, out of nowhere came a Word. A Word that shines in the darkness. A Word that transforms rage into peace. And heals the hopeless. You were buried in your baptism... You arose to new life! You have that constant and sure Word. You are that Word. You are the Body of Christ! Your time to lead is now. What are you going to do? It's your call, NOW!

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