

3 Pentecost, Proper 8

June 30, 2019

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21 Elijah places his cloak of power on Elisha, his successor.

Galatians 5:1, 13-25 Live by the Spirit; fruit of the Spirit; be guided by the Spirit

Luke 9:51-62 Jesus wants focused followers

The prophet Elijah passed his cloak onto Elisha. That cloak represented his power as a prophet of God, and all that he had learned, and all that he had been empowered to do. This scene is not just about the cloak, but it is about passing forward the story; his understanding of Faith in God; passed from mentor to student; enabling the next generation, and anchoring the next generation to something thought out and powerful; and making sure through that passing forward, that true Faith would endure.

(Show merit badge sash) – How many of you know what this is? Things I learned; skills and knowledge passed forward that still serve me today. (Show Order of the Arrow sash) –My OA sash signifies my commitment to cheerfully serve, as a sign of my desire to honor Boy Scouts and my country, and to be a better person.

I remember a lot of what I learned from my Scoutmaster (Dick Spry); and from my instructors for merit badges at Scout Camp in the summers; and from my time as an Assistant Scout Master in Valley Forge, Pa. I was the beneficiary of great people passing on to me important skills and character values.

The cross I wear is a sign of my desire to please God; to serve with the mind Christ; and to try to fulfill God's purpose for me. Commitment to serve defines us Christians.

1 Cor 15:3, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins ..." Paul was not making up a new faith; he was passing forward to his new churches the faith he had received.

In our reading from Luke's Gospel, Jesus reached the time: his time. He knew exactly what was required of him to fulfill the plan God had for him. Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem. As he started his final journey to Jerusalem, three people stated their intentions to follow him.

The first person said 'I will follow you wherever you go'. Jesus said that he himself had nowhere to lay his head. True followers would have to put up with some hardship, face some rejection, suffer some discomfort; and put aside worldly security. To REALLY follow him requires determination: then and now.

Jesus asked a second person to follow him. That person agreed, but wanted to first go and bury his father. Jesus said that he needed to come NOW, without any delay. That man did not know that Jesus only had a week or two left to live; the opportunity to follow was NOW. To TRULY follow Jesus requires not putting off doing what we know our faith has called us to do.

The third person who wanted to follow Jesus asked if he could first say goodbye to his family. Jesus said, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” If people are too busy looking back to where they have been, they will lose track of where they are going. Can you think of something that distracted you in the past – changed your path - and prevented you from accomplishing something now?

The point to these stories of a used cloak being handed down; and how to plow a field; is about following God’s call with determination, not putting it off, and staying focused on what lies ahead.

These lessons are asking us; How precious is our spiritual heritage to us? You and I are the care-givers of the Christian faith. I recently read that Christianity is always just one generation away from extinction. What will we pass forward to our children – and to their children – to other people we meet in our life?

A lot of our New Testament was passed on by word of mouth for at least twenty five years before being written down; from master to student; much like the passing forward of prophetic ministry (speaking the will of God) from Elijah to Elisha; from Jesus to his disciples; from our Sunday School teachers to their students; from Christian parents to their children; and from all of us who are committed to living into the image of Christ – passing forward our own personal experiences of Godly living to people who haven’t heard the story yet, or to people who weren’t told it with passion and conviction, or to people who were in the wrong spiritual place when they first heard it.

Elijah, Paul, and Jesus taught how very important it is to be anchored in the Faith we have received, to integrate that Faith into our own life (without watering it down), and then to pass it forward.

How precious is your spiritual heritage to you? Who are the people who passed that heritage on to you? How are you keeping that heritage alive?

What is the commitment and passion of Faith that you are passing on to the next generation?

What are the deliberate ways you are passing it forward? Sharing stories of God-incidents; giving a child their first Bible; offering to pray for a need...

We are responsible individually and as a community to ensure that the Christian faith does not become extinct in our generation. **The cloak has been passed to us; to show the world that our Christian faith is relevant – and in fact, vitally important NOW.** Amen.