

The Fifth Sunday of Pentecost

June 27, 2010

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14

Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Luke 9:51-62

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And so we bid farewell to Elijah! We must admit that's quite an exit; taken directly to God in a whirlwind as his servant, Elisha, looks on and sees "the chariots and horsemen of Israel."

The point is, of course, that Elijah does not die; he goes straight to heaven, and that is a pretty unusual occurrence. It's almost as though Elijah is set apart from the rest of us for some special purpose, later.

I suppose Elijah was missed by some people. A few people, particularly the King, Queen and religious establishment, were delighted to see him go. He had been so difficult, so judgmental about things like breaking a few commandments, ignoring The Law, and worshipping other people's gods. He had no ecumenical sense at all. He was rigid about the morals of kings and downright dangerous if you were the priest of some other God.

There's a sigh of relief in the house of the king: thank god, or gods, it's over. But it's not over; the mantle has been passed. The mantle was, you will recall, the hair of a camel, which would be hard to forget. Elisha has taken up the role and the mantle of his master.

Elijah had been a man of the countryside, the wilderness; Elisha is not. Elisha is a city dweller with some means, some connections. To take up that role means that Elisha must make a choice, a life-shaping choice.

Elisha can go back to living a life of the flesh, a life of relative comfort and self-gratification. He can seek power and wealth. There were then, and there are now, self-appointed prophets who spoke only what those in power wanted to hear. They were the antithesis of Elijah, but their life was easy.

Elisha can, like his master, follow a life of the Spirit, which means listening to, and speaking the words of, God. This is often not popular.

Elisha chooses the life of the Spirit. He slams the camel hair cloak of Elijah into the Jordan and shouts “Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?” God hears him; God empowers him; God parts the river Jordan and sends Elisha back to the people of Israel on his path of prophecy.

That’s the point of this morning’s Gospel. There comes a time to choose, a time to set priorities between the flesh and the Spirit. The hard sayings of Jesus shock and upset us, but they get our attention. They all point to one thing, a choice between the flesh and the Spirit.

Calling us all to make that choice is Elijah’s purpose and Elisha’s purpose. And seven centuries later a man who bore an uncanny resemblance to Elijah had the same purpose. He called all Israel from the banks of the Jordan from which Elijah had ascended and said to them, “Choose.” Repent, turn your life around and live in the Spirit, and then go back to the people of Israel and speak the word of God. The mantle is yours now, said John the Baptist.

He said it then, and he says it now, today. The choice is ours.

In His Holy Name.