

RESTLESSNESS, SACRED PLACES, AND MANTLES:
Elisha and Jesus Set Their Faces to Answer Their Ultimate Calls
The Rev. Dr. Barbara Anne Fisher - Trinity Cathedral – June 30, 2019

Sacred ground....Holy places....Sanctuaries of the heart....I pray that each of you have been pondering where those places have been for you in your life's journey. In our silent reading this morning, Scott Stoner, the co-founder of the Living Compass Wellness Program – from which we have received the Advent and Lenten study books – provided a beautiful reflection for each of us once again to pause and consider the importance of recognizing the sacred, holy, sanctuaries which exist within our spiritual journeys. This morning I would like to offer a further pondering of being able to identify the significance for such places as being touchpoints of change for our spiritual journeys. Of bringing us to our own personal wrestling with a restlessness of a calling forth - of “setting our faces” towards those moments for which we have been given breath.

Our First Testament reading this morning provides such a reflection of a sacred place and a calling forth “ for both the prophet Elijah, and his student/mentee, Elisha. Elijah must have sensed within his spirit that God was calling him to his point of destiny as he felt the restlessness to make the journey to Bethel. Elisha’s pledge to Elijah And, even though Elijah told Elisha three different times to “stay put and not follow him,” Elisha’s response to Elijah, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you,” was given as an ultimate lifetime commitment to Elijah that Elisha would never leave him or forsake him. Elijah’s question to Elisha, “Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you,” was a loaded question – a question intended to test Elisha’s true commitment to the call of accepting Elijah’s mantle of being a prophet. And Elisha did not let Elijah down, for in asking for a DOUBLE portion of that which Elijah

had carried – Elisha was letting Elijah know that he understood the cost of that which he was asking. I am sure there must have been tears in Elijah’s eyes – and a gentleness in his voice as he answered Elijah with, “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.” And, God granted to Elisha the vision of seeing Elijah taken up – and Elisha picked up the mantle, struck the water – which parted as it had for Moses – and crossed over into the fullness of his prophetic ministry.

It is important to note the similarities – but the distinct differences as well – between the First Testament reading and our Gospel for today. Jesus is on the move. His journey and time of ministry through Galilee is completed. A bit of backstory that is interesting to note are two key recordings earlier in chapter 9: First, Jesus has begun to prepare his disciples that at the time of the Je he will be betrayed and put to death; Second, is the story of the Transfiguration – when Moses and Elijah appeared in glory with him – a sign, I have always believed, of Jesus’ reception of both of their mantles as he was prepared to “set his face” towards Jerusalem – not as a merely a prophet as they had been , but as the Messiah sent to open all to God’s love, grace, and forgiveness.

It is apparent that there is a restlessness in Jesus. I am sure, by this time, Jesus has come to an understanding of that to which he is called – and, yet, as with each of us as we come to those moments of change within our lives – there is but a glimmer of comprehension within Jesus of what lives before him. We need to remember that Jesus was in human form – with human emotions – and, as the scriptures tell us, even at Gethsemane....Jesus asked, if possible, “the cup be taken away.”

In a reflection about today’s Gospel reading, which was written by Richard J. Schaffer, he notes that when we face times of change, “There is a tendency to resist. The journey Jesus walked was a difficult one...Luke 9:51 marks a significant transition in

Jesus' life and ministry. Jesus had been teaching about the sacrifice that would eventually be required of him, now his realization that "the days drew near for him to be taken up" caused him to change direction, heading toward Jerusalem..." Once again, I am sure that Jesus had found, during his times of separating himself and taking time away to pray, those sacred, holy, sanctuary places that marked the change moments of his ministry. And, in the answers given to those offering to follow Jesus, we can sense the depth to which Jesus knows that his is a path he must walk alone.

I began this reflection with the thought of offering a further pondering of identifying the significance of sacred, holy, places of sanctuary within our lives as being touchpoints of change for our spiritual journeys. Of bringing us to our own personal wrestling with a restlessness of a calling forth - of "setting our faces" towards those moments for which we have been given breath. As I shared in my last sermon, it is also at these moments that God does, indeed, send to us Saints to support us along the way. Elijah was such a support for bringing Elisha to the point of accepting his ministry; Jesus was the support for the rag-tag team of disciples who would, after a time of uncertainty and confusion about that to which they were truly called, rise up and live into the fullness of all that Jesus birthed within them. Gladys Hearne was, for me, the Saint sent to provide me guidance and a sense of security as I began the process of accepting myself as God created me.

Once again we are at that moment of personal self-reflection...and for breathing deeply the three questions posed by Scott in our silent reading:

1. What are those places that help you to be in touch with that which is most sacred for you? For it is in answering this question that we can truly begin to seek God's voice for our spirit journeys.

- 2. What places water your soul and restore your well-being? For it is in answering this question that we can truly begin to find “rest for our restless souls.” That we can find those places and allow those moments when we can find restoration, healing, and peace by which to “set our face” towards that to which, in these troubled times, we are called to provide ministry and be the Saint-send-by-God.**
- 3. And, finally, how will you be sure to make time to visit those sacred, holy places of sanctuary – in order to begin the journey towards that for which you were given breath? Amen.**