

November 19, 2017
2 Kings 2: 1-15, Acts 1: 1-11
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“May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O God, our rock and our redeemer.”

Brian McLaren tells the story of a little girl who asked her mother if the Bible story of Elijah flying to heaven on a chariot of fire was “real or pretend.” How would you have answered the question?

This particular mother said to her daughter: “That’s a great question! Some stories are real, some are pretend, and some of the very best ones use a mix of both reality and make-believe to tell us something important. What do you think of the Elijah story?”

The wise mother did not tell the daughter what to think – she invited her to think. (We Make the Road by Walking, Brian McLaren, Pg. 51)

This child along with the rest of us are members of what McLaren calls “the interpretive community.” We engage with the Bible stories in a search for meaning. We bring to the task: science, art, and heart.

These two stories are told about beloved leaders. They sound like **superheroes** in these readings as they leave the earth in such dramatic ways, particularly Elijah on a chariot of fire. Elijah was a prophet and miracle worker who lived in the northern kingdom of Israel during the 9th century. A Jewish prophet was the one who spoke for God to the King and to the common people. Elijah is recognized as a powerful and beloved prophet by Muslims and Christians, as well as Jews. The stories about him include tender healing, miracles of bread multiplied, poisoned water made pure, and raising someone from the dead. Sound familiar? These are similar to the kind of stories we hear about Jesus.

The biggest difference is that the stories of Elijah also include terror and violence as well as a fair amount of personal complaining on Elijah’s part. He could be a bit of a whiner.

In the Jewish tradition, Elijah was also known as the one who would come before the Messiah, preparing the way. While Jesus in the Christian tradition, is understood to be the Messiah himself.

It is no accident when you find themes and images repeated in the Bible as the authors seek to show a continuity in how God is working in the world. You might remember in the story of Jesus’ transfiguration, in the vision on the mountain Jesus is seen with Moses and Elijah to portray how he continues and in a sense, completes the circle.

What stands out for me today in these two stories is what happens when these great leaders depart? Are their messages and wisdom forgotten?

Once their followers pick their jaws up off the ground after such a fiery and mysterious departure, what will they remember? What impact will their lives have had? **Will they be “fans or followers”?** (McLaren)

The Prophet Elijah’s legacy would continue in Elisha. Elijah told Elisha before he was taken up to not get caught up in the fanfare of the fire and the chariot...pick up the mantle of God’s power and carry on. Jesus also told his disciples that they would receive power from God and must carry on as well.

From the time I was a child I was given the idea that Jesus didn’t want us to just stand there and keep looking up to the heavens, or put him so high on a cross that his teachings were out of reach for us. Jesus expected his disciples to quit looking up and to carry on. Jesus needs us – challenges us – invites us to **be** the Compassion – be the justice – embody the Love of God in our communities and in our individual lives. Jesus’ key message is that we are all beloved children of God. Whether we are landlords or tenants, children or adults, male or female, a King or a widower, **we have power and we are to use that power for good.** (And when we misuse our power, God’s love and forgiveness can transform and redeem it, that we might use our power for good.) We are, each of us, blessed to be a blessing.

These two stories got me thinking about the idea of legacy and how important it is to be purposeful in the living of our lives. We are the inheritors of the legacy of both Elijah and Jesus. If you were to read further into the time of Elijah, as well as the time of Jesus – you would find that they were dark and violent times. Many stories in the Hebrew Scriptures could give you nightmares. While perhaps not all factual – they painfully reflect our human tendency towards using our God-given power for violence and oppression **in God’s name** --- rather than for the common good.

AND gratefully, we also inherit the legacies of healing and abundance, renewal and resurrection.

While so much in those stories and contexts are different from our time, much of it is still the same. The violence as well as the gifts of healing and peace. The world needs each of us to be seriously mindful about how we live our daily lives and how we also create systems and institutions that foster health and wholeness. We need to be mindful of the legacies we are creating and leaving for the generations after us. We cannot afford to be complacent.

We are not superheroes, Prophets or Messiahs - but we do have power. Power to not just make our own personal life comfortable but power to contribute to the common good of the planet. Jesus left us with a legacy of blessing, faith, hope, service, forgiveness, and love. We are here because we do not want that legacy to be lost or forgotten.

In considering the idea of legacy – I was reminded of a reading I shared with you a few years back by George Bernard Shaw:

True Joy of Life by George Bernard Shaw

*This is the true joy of life.
The being used for a purpose
Recognized by yourself as a mighty one.
The being a force of nature
Instead of a feverish, selfish
Little clod of ailments and grievances
Complaining that the world will not
Devote itself to making you happy.
I am of the opinion that my life
Belongs to the whole community
And as long as I live,
It is my privilege to do for it
Whatever I can.
I want to be thoroughly
Used up when I die,
For the harder I work the more I live.
I rejoice in life for its own sake.
Life is no brief candle to me.
It is a sort of splendid torch
Which I've got hold of
For the moment
And I want to make it burn
As brightly as possible before
Handing it on to future generations.*

A life coach wisely said:

*"It is not what we leave for people – it is what we leave **in** them."*

It is an interesting question to ask yourself...and for us to consider as a church:

What do you want to leave **in** people?

The answer to that is not exactly the kind of thing you can put in a will.

I did find the following article helpful about building that kind of a legacy, not ONLY personally, but as I consider our church legacy. It is entitled “How to Start Building a Legacy You Can be Proud of”

Be genuine: When you are true and honest about who you are, others will trust that you will be honest with them.

Forgive easily – letting go of negative feelings that no longer serve you.

Never stop learning – A challenged, stimulated brain is the key to a vibrant life. The brain is a muscle, never stop giving it new opportunities for learning and growth.

Live with integrity – The ability to be honest and present your views and feelings appropriately. Making healthy choices, keeping your agreements with others...not tearing others down in order to build yourself up.

Make your work an expression of yourself – Make work a place to express your creativity. It doesn't matter what you do as long as it's fulfilling and satisfying.

Be a giver – Operate on the premise that you will get what you want as we in turn help others get what they want.

Treat people with respect –When you respect others it drastically improves relationships. Some ways to show respect are listening without getting distracted, giving others their private time and space, offering to help when someone needs it.

And finally ---

Write a legacy letter – Tell your loved ones what they mean to you. Tell people what you want them to remember and how much joy they bring you.

I found this to be a very helpful list of nonmaterial characteristics and attitudes to help in considering what we want to leave “in” others. I will re-visit it often and really appreciate the “legacy letter” idea.

And so my friends ----

What is the legacy you want to leave **in** others?

What is the legacy you want this church community to leave **in** others?

Neither Elijah nor Jesus want us to get lost in the dramatic details of these ancient stories, they want us to embody a legacy that reflects God's power of love, not the love of power. Amen.

