

No more holding on
2 Kings 2:1-12 & Mark 9:2-9

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Think about those moments in your life that you have wanted to hold on to. That moment on vacation when you finally started to feel relaxed. That family dinner when you are gathered around laughing and eating good food. The time at work where you were with a group of people that worked so well together. So many moments that we would like to go on and on and we work as hard as we can to hold on to them. Interestingly we have two such moments in this Sunday's readings.

The first is about Elisha who desperately wants to hold on to Elijah – his teacher, his mentor. Elijah is about to be taken up into heaven by the Lord. Elisha is to take his place, but it doesn't seem as if Elisha is ready. He won't let Elijah out of his sight. Elijah has been instructed by God to journey as far as Bethel. He tells Elisha to stay, but Elisha is having none of it. He says, "As long as the Lord lives and as long as you live, I'm coming with you." Then, there are the ever helpful company of prophets who seem to be accompanying Elijah and Elisha. They ask Elisha - Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" Elisha is like – I know. Shut up.

This happens again and again. Elijah tells Elisha to stay – Stay here for the Lord has sent me to Jericho and then stay here for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan. Each time, Elisha says I'm staying with you and each time – well you know – those prophets....

I get Elisha. Sure Elijah has prepared him, but now that the time is here, he is wondering if he will be able to fill Elijah's shoes. Will he be able to hear God? Will he be the prophet he needs to be for the people? Elisha puts off his separation from Elijah. He asks for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. He holds on as long as he can, but then the time comes and a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven.

Peter in the gospel reading is in a similar situation. Jesus has been telling the disciples that he is going to suffer, die and rise again. All they probably heard was die and Peter gets into trouble for lecturing Jesus about this. I think the mood must have been pretty somber as Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain. Then Jesus is transfigured – his clothes turning dazzling white. Elijah and Moses appear next to him. What an amazing and glorious moment and Peter wants to hold on to it probably more so with Jesus predictions of death and destruction. Peter recommends building tents, monuments to preserve this moment. Then a cloud descends and they hear a voice declaring that Jesus is his Son, and the glorious sight disappears. As they come down the mountain Jesus tells them not to tell anyone until the Son of Man rises from the dead.

What happened next? After Elijah is taken up, Elisha picks up Elijah's mantle, strikes a rock and parts the river just as Elijah did. The same company of prophets that had

been following them around declare “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.” Elisha goes forth to perform miracles and to take up his work as the prophet of the Lord.

After the transfiguration, Jesus goes back to his ministry. Peter continues to follow him and is there for his crucifixion, the empty tomb and goes on to be the leader of the new Christian community – the rock of the church.

In both of these stories, there is a preparation, a time of teaching and then to the dismay of both, an end then a new beginning. In this new beginning we see both Elisha and Peter doing God’s work, leading the people taking those next steps to fulfill God’s purpose in this world. They followed and were called to lead.

We have a God that does not let us hold on to moments - even the amazing astounding moments - because we follow a creating, life-giving God. It seems to me that God is always calling us into motion to respond to the changes and challenges that are happening. We are formed and prepared and then sent out. The transition is not easy and often we avoid it and try to hold on to what was before.

One of the blessings of being a priest is that I see these transitions happening in church all the time. I see it in the person who joins our community and starts to help in a certain ministry. Over time, either on their own or with the encouragement of another or the Holy Spirit, they take on more. Vestry members happen in this way. I see someone getting interested in the life of the parish. You see it in their actions and outlook and they say yes to being on vestry.

These moments happen in our daily lives. You get asked to take on a different role at work – one where you lead more or have more responsibility. Or perhaps in your volunteer work where you find yourself not just the doer but moving towards the being one organizers. Even in your family these transitions happen, and I believe they are part of God’s call because everything we do is part of God’s work. Our Christian leadership is not just confined to church, but happens in all that we do just by being the people of God who follow Christ.

One transition I find myself pondering is what we will be called to at the end of the pandemic. While the pandemic is certainly not over, with more and more people being vaccinated, I see glimpses of what will be. While this has not been a moment of shining glory for us that we want to remain in, it certainly had been a time of learning. What will this learning call us to do as people of God and especially church communities?

Will we doggedly go back to what was - in person worship done the same way as before? Will we lose the flexibility that we had to have during this time? Will we make continuing to have an online presence a priority? Will we continue all the new ways we have discovered of connecting with one another – making those phone calls when we couldn’t physically gather? I don’t think that we won’t continue these new ways, but I know that we will be tempted to hold on to what used to be and to water down our new

practices. These readings remind us to let go – to not hold on, to be attentive to moving forward into what God is calling us to.

Remember that we have a God that does not let us hold on because we follow a creating, a life-giving God. Let that creative ever-changing spirit of God keep our hearts open and ready to go forth into that next step that God needs us to take up in this world.