

CROSSING CHANGE

The Rev. Geoff Parker to Foreside Community Church - Falmouth, ME

Sunday, June 30, 2019

Scripture: [2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14](#)

INTRODUCTION TO THE SCRIPTURE

Today we visit with two prophets of God, who have been working together for some time. One is Elijah, the elder, who has reached the end of his ministry. The other is Elisha, the younger, who has followed and served at Elijah's side. When they first met, Elijah ran to Elisha and threw his mantle over him... kind of a drive by ordaining, which is definitely not how things usually go. There has since then always been a powerful connection between these two prophets.

You'll hear today how the prophetic retirement plan looks pretty wild. And you'll hear how, when it is time for them to part... it is hard, and it is sad. As it can be. Listen in.

SERMON

I am just back from 6 days traveling in Milwaukee to the United Church of Christ's 32nd General Synod... our national gathering of the church. 745 delegates, a thousand visitors, staff, and special guests gathered from around the country, and around the world. We worshiped, learned, listened, discerned and decided things in the special way that we do in the United Church of Christ.

Our ancestors in faith in the Congregational and Christian Churches especially believed that the Spirit is present right here, in a community gathered together to share life with one another, to worship with one another, and to discern how God was moving, and how God was calling them to move. And so we gather to listen for God, and for the heart and mind of Christ in our lives and in our world.

I think that happened for me in the last week, I truly do. I always learn something new, some new experience of another's life that I had never considered, some new piece of the church unfolding to meet this new day, this new morning of our common life that you can sometimes see on the horizon. There were lots of things to notice... and in the weeks to come, I'll be sharing some of the resolutions and action of the Synod, so you can know more about what we heard in the gathering of the Spirit there, and where it may be calling us to change... and where it may be calling new leaders and new directions.

But today, I just want to say... Even the Spirit's presence doesn't mean it's easy. Elijah and Elisha show us.

For me, this story always reminds me of being a kid getting dropped off at camp, maybe... or getting put on an airplane by yourself for the first time: The constant refrain... Elisha and I both say, "Can't you come with me a little farther?" Thanks for driving me... are you sure you don't want to see my cabin?

It is always hard to let go of the ways we have related to one another. Our mentors in faith and life ground us in identity, in aspiration, and sometimes in the safety of their authority. I wonder how we might more directly give thanks for their mentorship, and ask for their blessing as we take up leadership. I wonder how we can be challenged, like Elisha, not to look away from the change... but towards it.

I also know how much we all struggle with these changes as we age, and relationships change. We go from children, to adult children... but then, somewhere in there, there is often a need for children to become care-givers for parents... and this is not for the faint of heart. Nobody tends to enjoy this kind of “graduation day.” Yet I know that I have seen families struggle without, and families set free by having conversations in which this mantle of care is passed.

We have to. We have to face into these moments of transition, and do the hard work of releasing...*and blessing one another*... in our families, in our lives, and in the church. To discover the path across the Jordan yet again. To claim that unique way in which we are just like—and nothing like—the people and communities that raised us.

The Preamble to the Constitution of the United Church of Christ says this: “[We] affirm the responsibility of the Church in each generation to make this faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God.”

I love this. Maybe that’s not surprising that a pastor gets excited about church-y things in general, but I hope I have never come across as someone who is usually excited by preambles to constitutions. I mean, “We the people...” is pretty good, too... but maybe just those two preambles. I just love this statement and challenge to us all... “it is the responsibility of each generation to make the faith our own...”

And therefore it is the responsibility of the previous generation to encourage the taking up of that mantle, and to release the next generation from what has worked for us. Yes, I am in the *us*, no matter what my driver’s license says, the church as it has been has worked just great for me... let’s be honest, the church as it has been has been working for people who look like me for a *long* time, and I’m going to go out on a limb and say maybe that isn’t a sign of good health. Maybe that is a sign that we have not recently been asking how each new generation will make the faith its own in worship, thought and expression, and in heart. We have work to do to face the changes coming, and to bless one another in those changes.

Throughout our time at General Synod we had been hearing news of raids from our South West Conference... of fear and tenderness and resistance from our UCC Latinx Ministries... and later we would hear of the death of Oscar Alberto Martinez and his daughter in the Rio Grande. The question of how we might respond or be the church in these days was hanging over us.

On Monday the synod voted to call a halt to the business of the meeting, and chose instead to go and be with others in a public witness at the local Immigrations and Customs Enforcement office in Milwaukee. It made for a powerful statement, a church on the move... but what most impressed me were the local organizers of the action... most of them much younger than I am, which made them, well, very young by UCC standards....

Yet when the church arrived, there was a meeting of the minds and we were distributed to the four corners of the intersection by the ICE office, organized and directed by these young people. It made my heart glad, to see the elders of our church, who knew a protest or two in their youth, make themselves available to be a presence, a witness for others. It made my heart more glad to see the young people, clearly kind of smiling at these strange church people that had shown up to be with them... and clearly standing a little taller as they realized this was their witness, their mission, their moment...

A blessing of the generations took place there... no one crossed the Jordan, but a few crossed the street a few times... and no trucks crossed our lines carrying detainees that day. And leaders grew in spirit and power.

This is for us, the church, to make the faith our own in the living of these days... renewed by the witness of those who have gone before, and called to pass on our own blessings to the next... It is for us, the church, to consider how we are training up leaders, and granting them the power to walk new paths to freedom and liberation of all. It is for us, the church, to see the change, ask for blessing, and to bless... that there may be “Glory to God, whose power, working through us, is capable of more than we can ask or imagine, glory to God from generation to generation in the church, and in Christ Jesus.”^[1]

So today, we give thanks for all those people who have mentored you, and we give thanks for all those whom you will mentor. Be unafraid to see the change, be unafraid to bless and empower and release. So that we might be unafraid, I invite you to call out those names of those ancestors, mentors, and supporters of the faith... who do you lift up to God in thanks this day?