



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

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Date: 27th June 2010

Sermon: Rev Dr André Groenewald

Reading: 2 Kings 2:1-13

SERMON

In our reading this morning Elijah is saying goodbye and he visits all the significant places connected with Israel's entry into the Promised Land namely:

Gilgal was the first stopping-place after the Israelites had crossed the Jordan. Male Israelites born during the wilderness years were circumcised there, and a Passover was celebrated.

Bethel (2), meaning place of God, some 14 miles (24 km) into the central hills, was the place of Jacob's encounter with God (Gn. 28).

Jericho (4), in the Jordan valley not far from Gilgal, was the first town to fall to Joshua (Jos. 6), and *the Jordan* (6) had miraculously stopped to let Israel enter the land (Jos. 3).

The writer wants to emphasize and draw our attention to the parallels between Elijah's prophecy and Moses:

- Just like Moses, Elijah received a revelation of God on Mt Horeb, and his slaughter of the prophets of Baal had echoes of the aftermath of the golden calf incident
- Elijah crossed the eastern side of the Jordan river in a manner similar to the crossing of the Red Sea under Moses' leadership, whereby also Moses' ministry came to an end.
- The end of Moses' life was almost as mysterious as that of Elijah's.
- These parallels between the lives of the two men are underlined in the New Testament when they both appear speaking to Jesus

when He was praying with Peter, James and John the brother of James.

The meaning of these parallels between Elijah and Moses is quite significant. Moses was the mediator of the covenant at Sinai/Horeb, while Elijah was the prophet through whom the people were turned back to the Sinai covenant and Israel's special status was saved. In short, Moses was instrumental in bringing Israel into relationship with God while Elijah made sure they obeyed the promises of this covenant and stayed in a relationship with God.

If Elijah is identified as a second Moses, Elisha would appear to be in the mould of Joshua. As Joshua succeeded Moses as leader of the people, so Elisha succeeded Elijah, crossing the Jordan on dry land from east to west as Joshua did and following in Joshua's footsteps by going on to Jericho. There is also a close link between the meaning of the names of Joshua and Elisha. Elisha's name means "God is salvation", while Joshua means "Yahweh (the Jewish name for God) is salvation".

I am sure there are many sitting here this morning who feel like saying, "So what? Why all this information. What can it possibly mean for us?"

Well, for one, I think it is essential to the understanding of the message of our reading this morning to see the bigger picture of how God uses different people to do his work. Just as he called Moses he called Joshua and then Elijah and then Elisha. His work continues despite the frailty and finiteness of humans. He is infinite and stays in control. He calls different people for different tasks and if the "mantle" falls on you to follow in the footsteps of someone else, you must obey the calling of the Lord. The "mantle" was a special large over garment made of sheepskin worn by the prophet Elijah. In Biblical times people wore different clothes to discern them from others like Kings and prophets wore special garments to symbolize their special calling and unique roles. Prophets were called by God and wore these "mantles". Everyone could see from a distance that they were men of God called by him for a special mission.

God's work is never finished. He never sleeps. Israel could never manage to stay in a relationship with God and therefore He acted again when He, in Jesus Christ, came down to earth to save us from sin and invite us to follow Him through our service. He made it possible through Christ to use new people to carry on with His acts of mercy and love.

He even uses you and me! Can you imagine that?

Maybe you are sitting in this church this morning and feel that you are called by God but do not know where and when...just have faith, the Lord will show you the way. If you are sitting here this morning and feel that you:

- are too old,
- or too sick,
- or too young
- too ugly,
- too sinful,
- too frail,
- too incompetent

to serve the Lord, think again. God never makes mistakes. He knows that each one He calls is perfectly capable to do whatever He calls them to do. God uses you and me despite our struggles and incompetence! To each one of us He gave special gifts and talents. Our task is to discover them in prayer and thanksgiving to God.

We are never alone and without any help from God just as Moses, Elijah and Elisha discovered. He gave us His Holy Spirit to assist us in our journeys of faith.

Elijah acted on God's calling and left Elisha with a special job to do. What can you do to proclaim the message of salvation, love and mercy?

Amen