

2 Kings 2:1-14

Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah
up to heaven by a whirlwind,
Elijah and Elisha were on their way
from Gilgal.

² Elijah said to Elisha,
"Stay here,
for the LORD has sent me
as far as Bethel."

But Elisha said,
"As the LORD lives
and as you yourself live,
I will not leave you."

So they went down
to Bethel.

³ *The company of prophets
who were in Bethel
came out to Elisha
and said to him,*

*"Do you know that today
the LORD will take your master
away from you?"*

*And he said,
"Yes, I know; keep silent."*

⁴ *Elijah said to him,
"Elisha, stay here,
for the LORD has sent me
to Jericho."*

*But he said,
"As the LORD lives
and as you yourself live,
I will not leave you."*

So they came to Jericho.

⁵ *The company of prophets
who were at Jericho
drew near to Elisha
and said to him,*

*"Do you know that today
the LORD will take your master
away from you?"*

*And he answered,
"Yes, I know; keep silent."*

⁶ Then Elijah said to him,
"Stay here,
for the LORD has sent me
to the Jordan."

But he said,
"As the LORD lives
and as you yourself live,
I will not leave you."

So the two of them went on.

⁷ Fifty men of the company of prophets also went
and stood at some distance from them,
as they both were standing by the Jordan.

⁸ Then Elijah took his mantle
and rolled it up
and struck the water;

the water was parted
to the one side and to the other,
and the two of them crossed
on dry ground.

⁹ When they had crossed,
Elijah said to Elisha,
"Tell me what I may do for you
before I am taken from you."

Elisha said,
"Please let me inherit
a double share of your spirit."

¹⁰ He responded,
"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."

¹¹ As they continued walking and talking,
a chariot of fire and horses of fire
separated the two of them,
and Elijah ascended
in a whirlwind
into heaven.

¹² Elisha kept watching and crying out,
"Father, father!
The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!"

But when he could no longer see him,
he grasped his own clothes
and tore them in two pieces.

¹³ He picked up the mantle of Elijah
that had fallen from him
and went back and stood
on the bank of the Jordan.

¹⁴ He took the mantle of Elijah
that had fallen from him
and struck the water.

He said,
"Where is the LORD,
the God of Elijah?
Where is he?"

He struck the water again,
and the water was parted
to the one side and to the other,
and Elisha crossed over.

Reading Wisdom This Week

The succession of Elijah by Elisha,
Elijah taken up in a whirlwind, never dying,
Fed rich traditions of messianic expectation

I relish Elisha's stubborn persistence accompanying Elijah
Like us sticking with a shrinking church of geriatrics
And this year, 'passing the mantle' on my retirement

I also make fun of the figures of conventional wisdom
The 'company of prophets' – the normies, on-brand UCC clergy
Sinecured, cynical, dis-spirited, despairing

I've posted audio of Everett Fox' translation last summer:
<http://www.hereticslikeus.com/2024/08/2-kings-2.html>

2004 'Loyal Opposition' notes:
<http://www.billbrucewords.com/2004/06/loyal-opposition.html>

2010 'Succession' notes:
<http://www.billbrucewords.com/2010/07/succession.html>

The text also shows up now at Transfiguration:

2021 'Transfiguration – Renewing Membership'
<http://www.billbrucewords.com/2021/02/transfiguration-renewing-membership.html>

2024 'Transfiguration- Metamorphosis'
<http://www.billbrucewords.com/2024/02/transfiguration-metamorphosis.html>

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

¹ For freedom Christ has set us free.
Stand firm, therefore,
and do not submit again
to a yoke of slavery.

² Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that,
if you let yourselves be circumcised,
Christ will be of no benefit to you.

³ Once again I testify
to every man who lets himself be circumcised
that he is obliged to obey the entire law.

⁴ You who want to be
reckoned as righteous
by the law
have cut yourselves off
from Christ;
you have fallen away
from grace.

⁵ For through the Spirit,
by faith,
we eagerly wait
for the hope of righteousness.

⁶ For in Christ Jesus
neither circumcision nor uncircumcision
counts for anything;

the only thing that counts
is faith working through love.

⁷ You were running well;
who prevented you
from obeying the truth?

*⁸ Such persuasion
does not come
from the one who calls you.*

*⁹ A little yeast
leavens the whole batch of dough.*

*¹⁰ I am confident about you in the Lord
that you will not think otherwise.*

*But whoever it is
that is confusing you
will pay the penalty.*

*¹¹ But my brothers and sisters,
why am I still being persecuted
if I am still preaching circumcision?*

*In that case
the offense of the cross
has been removed.*

*¹² I wish those who unsettle you
would castrate themselves!*

¹³ For you were called to freedom,
brothers and sisters,

only do not use your freedom
as an opportunity
for self-indulgence,

but through love
become enslaved
to one another.

¹⁴ For the whole law
is summed up
in a single commandment,

“You shall love your neighbor
as yourself.”

¹⁵ If, however,
you bite and devour one another,
take care
that you are not consumed
by one another.

¹⁶ Live by the Spirit,
I say,
and do not gratify
the desires of the flesh.

¹⁷ For what the flesh desires
is opposed to the Spirit,

and what the Spirit desires
is opposed to the flesh,

for these are opposed to each other,
to prevent you
from doing what you want.

¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit,
you are not subject to the law.

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are obvious:
sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery,

²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities,
strife, jealousy, anger,
quarrels, dissensions, factions,

²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing,
and things like these.

I am warning you,
as I warned you before:
those who do such things
will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² By contrast,
the fruit of the Spirit
is love, joy, peace, patience,
kindness, generosity, faithfulness,
²³ gentleness, and self-control.

There is no law against such things.

²⁴ And those who belong to Christ
have crucified the flesh
with its passions and desires.

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit,
let us also be guided by the Spirit.

²⁶ *Let us not become conceited,
competing against one another,
envying one another.*

Reading the Epistle This Week

As I commented last week,
The lectionary tours 'Galatians: Gospel of Freedom'
omitting what awkwardly won't fit the premise:
<http://www.hereticslikeus.com/2023/04/galatians-gospel-of-freedom.html>
<http://www.hereticslikeus.com/2013/12/galatians-freedom-and-equality.html>

I appear to have avoided preaching Galatians 5 –
At least in this century, as truncated in the lectionary
But I've tried the 'freedom-licence' argument,
Using Isaiah Berlin's 'Two Freedoms' against Lennon:
<http://www.billbrucewords.com/2013/01/christian-unity.html>
<http://www.billbrucewords.com/2016/05/ascension-freedom-from-or-for.html>
<http://www.billbrucewords.com/2019/11/imagine-this.html>

I know that we love the catalogues –
The bad 'works of the flesh'
The 'fruit of the Spirit'
Reminding me of the 'codes of conduct'
And 'behavioural covenants'
Increasingly popular in our UCC subculture

Paul frames it as a choice
Between a *kasrut* practice of Judaism
And his version of Christianity –
But our renditions rarely avoid anti-semitic tropes,
And I'm happy to avoid the text altogether,
This last week of preaching!

Luke 9:51-62

⁵¹ When the days drew near
for him to be taken up,
he set his face
to go to Jerusalem.

⁵² And he sent messengers ahead of him.

On their way
they entered a village of the Samaritans
to prepare for his arrival,

⁵³ but they did not receive him
because his face was set toward Jerusalem.

⁵⁴ When his disciples
James and John
saw this,
they said,
"Lord, do you want us
to command fire
to come down from heaven
and consume them?"

⁵⁵ But he turned
and rebuked them.

⁵⁶ Then they went on
to another village.

⁵⁷ As they were going along the road,
someone said to him,
"I will follow you
wherever you go."

⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him,
"Foxes have holes,
and birds of the air have nests,
but the Son of Man has nowhere
to lay his head."

⁵⁹ To another he said,
"Follow me."

But he said,
"Lord, first let me go
and bury my father."

⁶⁰ And Jesus said to him,
"Let the dead
bury their own dead,
but as for you,
go and proclaim
the kingdom of God."

⁶¹ Another said,
"I will follow you, Lord,
but let me first say farewell
to those at my home."

⁶² And Jesus said to him,
"No one
who puts a hand to the plow
and looks back
is fit for the kingdom of God."

Reading the Gospel This Week

The lectionary is back in Luke for the summer,
Setting course toward Jerusalem,
Leaving Galilee, passing through Samaria
suitable start to a summer season!

I've preached the Transfiguration,
And Peter's confession,
But haven't got notes for this bit –

It's a challenge to costly discipleship
Scolding both the vindictive competitors,
And the ambivalent equivocators

Again, on my last week as a preacher,
I'll avoid it altogether,
In favour of the succession story
From 2 Kings 2

(curious, though
About the image of plowing,
Since Elisha had run 12 yokes of oxen
Before following Elisha)

That's it for me – thanks!