

Garments of Glory, by Ken Pennings (06'26'22)

2 Kings 2:1-4 (excerpts)

(On the platform is a cloak piled in a heap on the floor)

Three weeks ago, we heard Tammy Martens' sermon on Acts 2, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

What many may not realize about the fabulous Old Testament story that Deanna just read is that it likely formed the basis for Luke's account of the stories of Jesus' ascension into heaven and the day of Pentecost in Acts, chapters 1 and 2.

One of Luke's main objectives in writing the Gospel of Luke and its sequel, the Acts of the Apostles, was to identify Jesus of Nazareth as the new Elijah who lived approximately 1000 years before the birth of Jesus and was revered as one of Israel's greatest prophets.

How did Luke attempt to convince others how important Jesus of Nazareth was? By linking Jesus

with the great prophet Elijah. Luke created the stories of Jesus and the apostles with bits and pieces of the sacred stories from the Hebrew Bible. This is an ancient style of Jewish storytelling called Midrash.

Through at least three points of contact, Luke magnified Elijah's ascension (2 Kings 2) to create his stories of Jesus' ascension and of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

1) Elijah ascends into heaven with his disciple Elisha watching until he is out of sight. Similarly, Jesus ascends into heaven with his disciples watching until he is out of sight.

2) Elijah bestows a double portion of his spirit upon his disciple Elisha. Similarly, on the day of Pentecost, God's spirit is poured out not just on one man, but on many.

3) Elijah ascends in a mighty wind in a chariot of fire drawn by horses of fire. Similarly, on the day of Pentecost, there is the sound of a mighty wind and the spirit descends on the disciples with a tongue of

fire resting upon each of their heads. Wind and fire in both OT and NT stories!

In part, Luke was arguing through his dramatic portrayal of Jesus' ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that a new and greater Elijah was here.

So why focus on a text like 2 Kings so soon after Acts 2? Because the NT story was inspired and influenced by the OT story. This certainly indicates that we're not reading simple history. Rather, we're exploring mystery.

But now let's return to the story in 2nd Kings from which some of the details in the stories in Acts were borrowed.

I love so many things about this story:
The close relationship between the master Elijah and his disciple Elisha, the bond of trust and devotion between them. It reminds me of the relationship between Mr. Miyagi and Daniel LaRusso in the movie Karate Kid.

I'm curious about the somewhat arbitrary, perhaps comical, deal Elijah made with Elisha – "If you see me leave, you'll receive a double portion of my spirit. But if you don't see me leave, you won't get anything." That had to be an inside joke between them. I mean, really, what are we supposed to make of that?!!!

But what I find most interesting about this story is Elijah's cloak, or mantle. When the two men come to the river Jordan, Elijah rolls up his mantle and strikes the water. The water parts, and the two men cross over on dry ground. When Elijah is taken up into heaven, this mysterious and powerful mantle falls from his shoulders and wafts to the earth, much like a leaf falling from a tree.

Elisha's own clothes were no good to him any longer since he had just torn them in shreds. So he picks up Elijah's mantle, strike's the water of the Jordan, and says "Where is the God of Elijah?" The water parts and Elisha crosses over on dry ground.

A simple garment, perhaps one Elijah had found on sale in a thrift shop, now a symbol of such rich

importance and significance! For Elisha, this garment meant a great deal!

- 1) It was tangible reminder of his dearly departed friend and teacher;
- 2) It was evidence that indeed Elijah had bestowed on him a double portion of his spirit;
- 3) It was a commissioning with authority and responsibility to continue the mission and ministry of his teacher;
- 4) It was the answer to his most urgent question, "Where is God?"

God is right here, in this tattered, well-worn, dusty cloak! Because of what it symbolizes, it is indeed a "garment of glory."

Sometimes when we read the miracle stories in the Bible, we get so caught up with the fantastic and grandiose aspects of the stories, that is, the supernatural intervention of God in the lives of human beings, that we miss the natural, simple, ordinary, mundane details of the stories.

What if one intent of miracle stories is to see God working in and through the everyday stuff of life?

Consider a sampling of other biblical miracle stories that feature not a cloak, but other material things: the stars; a bush; a rock; a big fish; a den of lions; a storm; a coin, bread; water; or wine.

When we interpret miracle stories, we may want to pay careful attention to the subtleties of God's presence in the material stuff of the story, the common, ordinary, everyday stuff of life that is symbolically transformed into glory.

God in this very cloak! (Preacher picks up a cloak from the floor and puts it on)

The real question we ask then of biblical miracle stories is "Where *isn't* there a miracle?" Everywhere we look, in everything around us, there is a miracle!

Is the miracle of 2nd Kings the parting of the Jordan River so one can cross over on dry ground? Is the miracle a prophet taken away in a whirlwind into heaven in a chariot of fire pulled by horses of fire? Or

is the miracle a threadbare, frayed, sweat-soaked cloak in a heap on the ground? Yes!

Where is the miracle? Where isn't there a miracle?!

Where is Elijah's God, Elisha asks. Where isn't Elijah's God, he may Elisha asks, "Where is Elijah's God?" He might well have asked "Where isn't Elijah's God" he might well have asked.

For God is everywhere right here, right now, in everything that is.

Now here's a mind-bender, if not a bit of a detour -- within Scripture there are dozens of mystery-stories of people wearing all kinds of special clothing: Joseph's coat of many colors; the blue, purple and scarlet finely woven garments of the priests; the clothing of the King's daughter in Psalm 45 which was interwoven with gold and beautifully embroidered; John the Baptist's garment of camel's hair accessorized by leather belt and sandals; the clothes Dorcas sewed for the poor; Jesus at his transfiguration wearing dazzling clothes whiter than any bleach could make them.

But there are also a few mystery-stories of people wearing little or no clothing: Adam & Eve naked and unashamed; David dancing before the Lord with all his might wearing only his underwear; Jesus taking off his outer garment to wash the disciples' feet.

In all these mystery-stories, we find God in the details. Whether people are clothed or unclothed, we often find glory in what is symbolized.

Play "Everything is Holy Now," by Peter Mayer.

[\(121\) Peter Mayer "Holy Now" \(with lyrics in captions\) - YouTube](#)

Elisha slowly bends over and picks up a hand-me-down. But for him, it's a garment of glory.

What garment of glory have you worn or brought to church today?

A favorite baseball cap or a hand-embroidered sweater your grandmother made for you? Perhaps something mass-produced or something painstakingly handmade with precision and artistry?

Whatever it looks like, it's beautiful to you because of what it symbolizes!

What makes **this** your 'mantle,' or your 'garment of glory'? What power, authority, responsibility, mission, ministry, is associated with this simple-but-holy item? And, perhaps, even more importantly, how is this garment an expression of, or connection with Love?

AMEN