

February 11, 2018 – Journey worship

THEME: Speak the Truth

TEXT: 2 Kings 2:1–12

TITLE: Two Pieces of the Puzzle

By the Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy

Most of us are probably somewhat familiar with the story of Elijah ascending into heaven in a whirlwind after his prophetic ministry was complete. Elijah's dramatic departure from this earthly life as a living, breathing being is typically the focus of sermons preached from this passage. And Elijah's doesn't appear again until hundreds of years later. When he suddenly appears on a mountain top with Moses and the two of them are in conversation with the transfigured Jesus, whose face was shining like the sun and clothing was white as light. If you recall, Jesus brought John and Peter along with him to pray that day and when they witnessed this otherworldly event, Peter in his exuberance said to Jesus: "Lord it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." Matthew goes on to say in describing the event of Jesus' transfiguration that, "while Peter was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud the voice of God exclaimed: 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased.'" Peter was speaking, when he should have been silent and paying attention to what God was doing. It's at times such as these that we are reminded that God gave us two ears and one mouth, perhaps denoting that we are to do twice as much listening, as we do speaking.

I know we have all experienced the phenomena of reading something, particularly the Word of God and each time we read it the Spirit causes us to notice or see something that we have never seen before. This was my experience when I read 2 Kings 2 earlier this week. I had never noticed before that when the company of prophets in Gilgal and Jericho inquired of Elisha "Do you know that today, the Lord will take your master away from you?" Both times Elisha answered: "Yes, I know; be silent."

To everything there is a season. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent.

On April 12, 1963, eight Alabama clergymen dispatched a letter voicing their collective wisdom and opinion to the Rev. Dr. Martin L. King, Jr., who at the time was residing in the Birmingham Jail. The letter read in part:

"We the undersigned clergymen are among those who in January issued 'An Appeal for Law and Order and Common Sense,' in dealing with racial problems in Alabama. We expressed understanding that honest convictions in racial

matters could properly be pursued in the courts but urged the decisions of those courts should be in the meantime be peacefully obeyed... However, we are now confronted by a series of demonstrations by some of our Negro citizens directed and led in part by outsiders. We recognize the natural impatience of people who feel that their hopes are slow in being realized. But we are convinced that these demonstrations are unwise and untimely..."

I submit to you this morning that untimely, loud, boisterous, angry yet, peaceful demonstrations are oft-times the only thing that gets the attention of people in positions of power and authority. When Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans stand their ground and march in the streets or on reservations to protest unequal and unjust policies and treatment; when women of every color and ethnicity descend on Washington, D.C.; LA; Pittsburgh; NYC and other cities across this country decrying the rights of women to receive equal pay, stand up for their right to not be objectified and violated and declare that times up; when the poor gather to demand affordable, livable housing, healthcare and educational opportunities; when any group of people, be they those directly affected by unjust systems or their allies stand up and speak with a loud voice, it's time for those who have the power and authority to listen, truly hear and exercise their privilege for the betterment of the whole.

Twice, Elisha told two companies of prophets, be silent. Elisha's response was reminiscent of Elijah's experience, as he stood on the mountain waiting to hear from God in 1 Kings 19:12. God didn't speak from the rushing, rock breaking wind, the earthquake or fire, God spoke from the sheer silence and gave Elijah his next assignment.

We don't really know why Elisha told the companies of prophets to be silent. Perhaps he was not ready to face being separated from his mentor, who anointed him as a prophet of God; perhaps he knew that God was up to something and he didn't want to miss the move of God being distracted by side chatter and conversation; perhaps knowing that Elijah's days were numbered, he wanted to make sure he was ready to receive his assignment and thus was hanging on Elijah's every word. After all, three times Elijah instructed Elisha to stay and not follow him, but Elisha refused, saying: "As the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." Elisha followed Elijah from Gilgal to Bethel, from Bethel to Jericho, and from Jericho across the Jordan River which they crossed on dry land. It was on the other side of the Jordan that Elijah, caught up in the whirlwind ascended up to heaven.

Dr. King was caught up in a whirlwind; jailed in Birmingham where he had gone at the request of the Alabama Movement for Human Rights to come stand with them against the racism and injustices that were continually being meted out on the Black citizens, when he was chastised by the eight clergymen in their attempt to drive him out of the city and silence him. But instead of allowing his circumstances to silence his prophet voice, Dr. King composed a letter that became the foundation of the Civil Rights Movement; a modern manifesto of non-violent resistance, written in the margins of newspapers and on the backs of legal papers, smuggled out of the jail in installments by his attorneys. To everything there is a season, a time to speak up and a time to be silent. Dr. King, knew it was time to speak up when confronted by the eight clergymen, who decried outsiders coming in and stirring up trouble, and he wrote these poignant words that still ring true today:

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial, ‘outsider agitator’ idea. Anyone who lives in the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere in this country.”

That’s a word for today. That’s the word we declare in our daily living when we walk with and stand beside the dispossessed, visits our state and federal representatives and in letters to Mr. Trump—anyone who lives in the United States of America can never be considered an outsider anywhere in this country! United to we stand, or divided we shall fall. To everything there is a season, a time to be silent, as Elisha told the prophets and a time to speak up, as Dr. King did so eloquently under some of the most egregious circumstances.

I submit to you that only when we hear from God are we able to speak with authority and power. The two puzzle pieces fit together to form a complete picture: persistent, fervent, God seeking prayer and spirit-filled, righteous and powerful speaking—both are needed and both are required in order to speak and act prophetically. Our prayer is that we know when to exercise which.

Amen