

Sunday June 22, 2025 Riverside United Church

Scripture Reading 2 Kings 2:1-2,6-14

Elijah Ascends to Heaven

2 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.

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^[a] 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, until 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.

Elisha Succeeds Elijah

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, saying, 'Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?' When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

Reflection

"Passing on the Mantle"

Jeannie Taylor, LLWL

In September of 2022, I retired from my full-time job as a Human Resources Officer at South-East Ottawa Community Health Centre. My plans were to garden, travel, lead worship and volunteer at Emmanuel and in the wider church. Two years later, I was separated from my husband, had sold the house and my garden, and bought a condo in a hi-rise closer to Riverside. Then I saw an ad for an Office Administrator at Riverside, 16 hours per week, and I thought I could do that. So I came out of retirement to apply and I'm so glad I did.

In the meantime, Louise also reached a transition point in her life and decided to retire from a job she loved. In our two weeks training, and during the months since, she has been passing on the knowledge she learned over her many years as the Office Administrator here, and I have tried to pick up the mantle she passed on to me.

For many years I have heard the expression, “take up the mantle” but until I read this passage closely, I did not know where it originated from. Elisha was an apprentice of sorts with the prophet Elijah. Elijah had successfully confronted the corrupt and evil king Ahab and Queen Jezebel and was well regarded by those in the school of prophets.

They both knew Elijah was reaching his retirement age, and Elisha wanted to learn all he could from Elijah, so that he could be just as holy and well-respected. When Elijah’s retirement day comes, there appears a chariot of fire and horses of fire to separate the two, which is where the spiritual “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” comes from. Elijah does not die but is sent up to heaven in a whirlwind. All that remains is Elijah’s torn cloak, which he had used to part the waters of the River Jordan. Elisha picks it up, strikes the water with it, and lo and behold the waters divide, a sign that he has inherited Elijah’s spirit.

The word “mantle” has multiple meanings. It can either be a loose, sleeveless cloak or shawl, or an important role or responsibility that passes from one person to another. In this case it had a double meaning. Elisha had said he wanted a double share of Elijah’s spirit. In this passage he receives the mantle, both literally and figuratively. A “double share” was the portion of the inheritance normally given to the firstborn and heir. Elisha desires this affirmation of leadership so that he can carry on Elijah’s work.

Elisha picks up Elijah’s mantle and continues his prophetic ministry. He goes on to serve as a prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel for about 50 years, working at the national level as well as in the lives of individuals, seeking always to bring people back to honouring God’s reign.

Elisha’s request was audacious, but sometimes you need to go out on a limb, imagine big things, and trust in divine power to help you overcome life’s challenges. What if we started each day by asking God, “What great thing will you do in my life today?” and “What great thing will I do today?” Then we would be on the lookout for ways that we have been blessed or been a blessing to others and be grateful to be agents of God’s love.

Just as Elisha picked up Elijah’s mantle, as Christians, we’re called to pick up the mantle of discipleship. We are asked to take up the ministry of God’s love and justice – and move forward, many times reframing or redefining what it means to do ministry in today’s world.

We do not only take up mantles in our professional lives. Often the things we do that are most meaningful to us are outside of our paid employment. One of our ministers who retired in 2020 had offered a weekly Faith Study in the evenings, that was very

helpful and meaningful to me. I felt called to pick up her mantle and continue that Faith Study over ZOOM throughout the pandemic, and it was a wonderful way for a group of Emmanuel friends to meet, connect, and discuss God's message for our lives today. When the pandemic forced me to work from home and I no longer saw my work colleagues on a daily basis, it was the faith study and leading worship that grounded me and gave my life meaning.

The mantles we wear may be temporary and will change throughout our lives. Often, they will give purpose to our lives because they are something we have chosen to do, rather than something we have to do for paid employment. Maybe you were a nurse who is called to a Ministry of music, a former teacher who is called to work in the church garden, or a retired colonel who is called to manage the technology in worship.

In her book "An Altar in the World", the author and episcopal Priest, Barbara Brown Taylor, talks about a group of clergy she met with on a monthly basis in the small town where she lived several years ago. They discussed the demands of their jobs, encouraged one another, and shared wisdom about how to keep their sense of vocation alive.

Taylor says she felt most deeply for her Baptist colleague, whose role required him to preach three different sermons every week while keeping up with all the other demands of his congregation. If he stayed home for a morning to work on the sermons, people complained that he was not available. If he came into the office, he was constantly interrupted.

What saved him, she said, was the clown outfit hanging in his closet. On his days off he would put it on and go out in the community to make people laugh, at children's hospitals, nursing homes and charity benefits.

The Methodist minister was a volunteer fireman, the Catholic priest taught Italian at a community college, and Taylor herself wrote books. She explains, "*All of us were committed to parish ministry, which was our main vocation. What allowed us to keep answering the call to do it, however, was knowing that there was something else we could do too.*" It is important to find your passion and pursue it, because that will enable you to live with purpose.

There will soon be a passing of the mantle at Riverside United. This fall we will have Rev. Brian Copeland start with us in a temporary capacity, as the search committee continues to look for a permanent minister. We may have expectations that they will bring all the qualities we appreciated in Paul and each of the former ministers we have had. I was on the Candidacy Board for East Ontario and Quebec, and I know that ministerial candidates have noted that congregations want them to be good preachers, patient and compassionate pastoral care providers, have the ability to attract young families, bake pies, and raise money. Oh, and also walk on water. Maybe we have set the bar a little high. Maybe what we are looking for is a servant leader, one who shows empathy, fosters a community of love and acceptance, sets aside power and status to

serve the needs of others, and focusses on the spiritual growth and nourishment of the people in the congregation. When we find a new minister, they will accept the mantle that has been passed on to them, and we will be blessed by the gifts that they share.

What mantles do you wear? Is there a mantle calling you to pick it up? Maybe now is the time to try it on. If you are an elder maybe you can pass on your wisdom to a young person. Whether it is cooking, gardening, woodworking or knitting, there may be a youth in your family or community who would benefit from spending time with you. What mantles do you recognize are worn by those around you? Have you told them lately what a gift they are, and how grateful you are that they are carrying that mantle?

Nelson Mandela said, "There is no passion to be found playing small—in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living." If you are not currently wearing a mantle that fuels your passion, maybe you should pray on it.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.

May it be so.

Amen