

## EPIPHANY 3 – 2009

### 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 19: 19 - 21

Elijah's work was hard. He delivered the Word of the LORD God in a place where, and at a time when, it was not much appreciated. Elijah knew he was not alone as a believer in the LORD in Israel, but seven thousand still was not many for the entire northern kingdom. The King and Queen's religion, Baalism, certainly had taken over. But there were those seven thousand. They needed to hear God's Word and promises. They needed encouragement and to be strengthened in the only true faith. In these few words of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 19, God, through Elijah, was providing for another generation to be able to hear God's Word. Here begins the seminary training of Elisha.

We, too, need to

### **Keep 'Throwing the Preacher's Cloak' over Men**

for the next generation.

The work of preaching and teaching God's Word, even the sweet, strong, forgiving, encouraging, saving Word of the Gospel, is not always easy. Elijah certainly had seen the Gospel produce its good fruit. Elijah even got to see that Gospel create faith outside of Israel, to the north, at Zephath, practically in the backyard of Jezebel, the evil queen, the wife of Ahab, King of Israel. Only recently Elijah got to hear a big crowd of people shouting, "The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!"

But a man's feelings can change in a hurry. Jezebel threatened again to kill Elijah! Elijah's spirit crashed. He was so discouraged Elijah wanted to die. In fact, Elijah just took off and probably never expected to return to Israel or to his work again. He had been through a lot and the years were going by. But God turned Elijah around by the Gospel, headed him back to Israel, and added a new responsibility to his long list of responsibilities. The LORD, with His still small voice of the Gospel, but very, very powerful, had several more years left yet for Elijah to work.

What was Elijah's new task? Train his replacement. Why? Because the next generation of people was going to need to hear the Word of the LORD just as much as the present generation did.

And, upon his return, that was Elijah's first order of business! God, in fact, told Elijah to call, ask, a man named Elisha to be that person. Elijah found Elisha at a place called 'Abel Meholah' in the Jordan Valley.

We do not know if Elijah knew Elisha before this. God did though! God knew Elisha had the gifts and the faith to be His Prophet. No one should take such an office to himself. A man needs God's call through God's people. God called, summoned, Elisha through Elijah.

That is what Elijah tossing his prophet's cloak, mantle, over Elisha represented. Elisha knew the meaning of it. God does not force people to serve Him in preaching. He does encourage, persuade, and urge, though. He may use people to do that. It may be parents or grandparents or uncles and aunts or other Christians who know a person. It may be a Pastor or a teacher who encourages someone to keep the matter of being a pastor or teacher in mind.

Parents, if one of your children expresses the thought of being a pastor, teacher, or missionary, for example, please nurture that. Do not discourage it! Pray about it and for it.

Elijah did not force Elisha. Elijah issued the call and waited. That is what Elijah meant when he said to Elisha, "What have I done to you?" It is a Hebrew way of saying, 'I have not forced this on you. Think on it and let me know.'

Elisha was from a very wealthy family. The average man then could not afford one pair of oxen, let alone twelve. Elisha had the good life. But he knew that serving the LORD His Savior and the LORD's people was far more important than any occupation. The temptation can be to compare all the time and effort for preparation, the hard work that it is with the perhaps smaller earthly rewards than others receive who prepare for so long. Parents even sometimes steer children away from such public ministries because the pay will not be as good.

Young people, the One encouraging you to serve people with His Word and Sacraments is none other than Jesus. He is your Savior who served you. He worked harder than anyone else ever has at doing what only He could do, ransom us, body and soul, from sin and the grave to earn for us forgiveness, new life, and eternal salvation. Jesus, with all of His shining, heavenly hosts, is always with us, especially as we serve in the Name of the Lord.

It is hard work but Jesus' strength is with us. And we have got the greatest tool of all, the Word of God, the Good News of Jesus in Word and Sacrament. It creates people who trust in Jesus. It guides them through this life to eternal life with Jesus who died for us but who then raised Himself from the dead, ascended and rules everything, in heaven and earth for the benefit and blessing of His people.

Elisha kissed his mother and dad good-by, turned the yoke of oxen he had been plowing with into a farewell meal for his family and friends, even using the wood in parts of the plow to fuel the fire that cooked the meat. It was a sort of cutting himself entirely free from his past. Then he followed Elijah to learn, to be prepared and to serve.

If one tries to add up the years between these verses and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 2 when God took Elijah to heaven, without the benefit of death, by the way, at least six years went by, six years of Elijah teaching and training and preparing Elisha for the office of Prophet, an office God Himself confirmed to Elisha when the merciful, loving LORD caused Elijah's cloak to fall down to Elisha as God visibly took Elijah away to eternal life. By the way, the next time anyone on earth saw Elijah was about nine hundred years later as he talked with Jesus in front of Peter, James, and John on the mountain. Not long after that, Jesus finished His calling on the cross and at the empty tomb.

Young people, the years are going by for me and others of my generation very fast. The next generation will desperately need to hear the good word about Jesus, Washer away of sin, Victor over Satan, Conqueror of death, Giver of heaven and even more. Jesus is Hope for this tired, sinful, dying, lost world. Might you be one to carry on this most important work? If you have at all thought of it, begin to prepare. I encourage you to do it. I will not force you but I am willing to help if I can. We need another generation of pastors and teachers. Amen.