

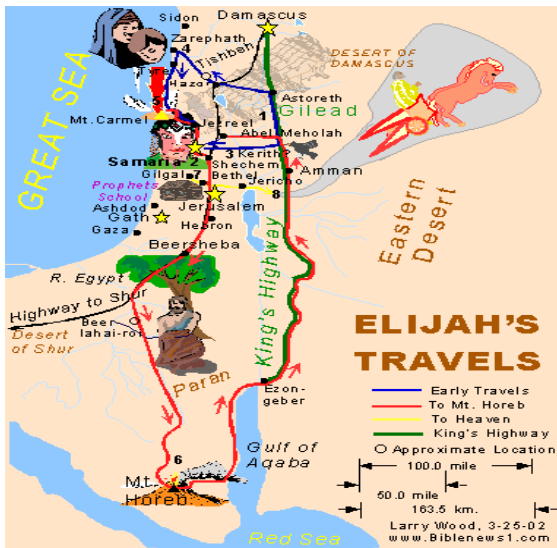
SERMON FOR JUNE 30, 2013

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i (UCC)
6th Sunday after Pentecost/4th of July this Thursday

7:45 & 10:30 Worship Services

Scripture: **2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-15 (Focus); Luke 9:51-62**

Message: **"We Are All Ministers of GOD's Aloha!"**
Kekapa P.K. Lee



Gathering in the Word

Faith and commitment inspires boldness and audacity and GOD wants us to be **bold** in our requests and responsibilities and things we do everyday! Today's Scriptures from 2 Kings and Luke 9 affirm and declare that GOD's realm promises great things and asks us to be persistent and focused in our quest to be faithful! We may have to let go of familiar relationships and comforts to awaken us to the wonders that GOD has in store for us. Sacrifice is essential and key to living faith and our sacrifices open us to surprising powers and possibilities!

So what does the WORD say to us this morning?

Hearing the Word

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14 (The VOICE Bible)

2 ¹Elijah and Elisha were leaving Gilgal when the Eternal One planned to snatch Elijah up into the heavens by *the power of* a fierce dancing wind.

Elijah (to Elisha): ² I ask you to remain here. The Eternal has commanded me to go all the way to Bethel.

Elisha: As certain as your own life and the life of the Eternal, I refuse to abandon you.

So the two men traveled down to Bethel together,

Elijah (to Elisha): ⁶ I beg you to remain here. The Eternal One has commanded me to travel to the Jordan *River*.

Elisha: As certain as your own life and the life of the Eternal, I refuse to abandon you.

So the two men then traveled *to the Jordan River* together.

⁷ While Elijah and Elisha were standing near the Jordan River, 50 of the prophets' disciples *from that area* stood at a distance from them on the other side. ⁸ Elijah removed his cloak and rolled it up; then he struck the water with it, and the water divided. Elijah and Elisha then walked across on dry land. ⁹ After the two had made it to the other side of the Jordan, Elijah spoke to Elisha.

Elijah: Tell me what it is you would like me to do for you before I am taken away from you.

Elisha: Please, I wish to receive a double portion of your spirit. *As your successor, I want to have twice the portion of your power.*

Elijah: ¹⁰ What you have requested of me is challenging, but it will be done if you witness my departure. But if you do not watch, then you will not have your double portion.

¹¹ Now as the two continued walking along and talking *as they normally did, something incredible happened.* A blazing chariot pulled by blazing horses *stormed down from the heavens and* came between Elijah and Elisha. Then Elijah was swept up into heaven by the *fiery* storm.

¹² Elisha witnessed this *amazing spectacle.*

Elisha: My father, O my father! The chariots and riders of Israel!

Elijah and Enoch (Genesis 5:24) are the only two men in the Bible to leave earth while they are still alive. Although they are separated by centuries of time, both men are inseparable from God, and both leave quite a legacy: Elijah's successor, Elisha, continues his mentor's work, even calling out Elijah's name for help. Enoch's son,

Methuselah, lives longer than anyone else ever has, which is proof that he, too, lives properly.

Elisha never saw Elijah again. Elisha grabbed the clothes he was wearing, and he ripped them in half. ¹³⁻¹⁴ He picked up Elijah's cloak, which had dropped *to the ground when he was taken up into heaven*, and then he went back to the Jordan riverbank and stood. He struck the water with the cloak.

Elisha: Where is the Eternal One? Where is Elijah's True God?

After Elisha struck the water, the *Jordan River divided, just as when Elijah had struck the waters*. Elisha then walked across *on dry land*.

There's no getting around it that this is a very curious and remarkable story. We're tipped off that Elijah was departing and leaving via a whirlwind! So the author is filling in the details. Also—the story has some humor as Elijah keeps trying to take leave of Elisha and Elisha doesn't want to hear about it. This takes place 3 times in a row in identical language.

- ✓ Was Elijah testing his successor Elisha?
- ✓ Was Elijah trying to spare Elisha a tearful aloha and a hui hou (*Hawaiian for 'farewell'*)?
- ✓ Was Elijah himself a little confused as to what he was supposed to do seeing as basically everyone seemed to know the clock was ticking before Elijah's departure from this life and earth?

These two servants of GOD really love each other and care for each other! For his part—Elijah has one last divine miracle up his sleeve as he snaps the Jordan (River) with his coat to have the river

part for him so he and Elisha can walk on dry land to the other side. Then Elijah asks Elisha what he can do for him and Elisha asked to be made just like his master Elijah—only twice more so!

The next thing you know is we get this fiery display from heaven that blinds and disorients all who saw it and when the fire and wind and dust had cleared—Elijah was gone!

So Elisha tests out and repeats Elijah’s miracle at the river—and the river parts for Elisha! Everyone now knows that Elisha is GOD’s anointed heir for the great prophet who is now gone. Elisha now becomes the center of attention and the source of a whole bunch of miracles—like getting an axe head to float, fixing a badly prepared soup as well as some quite amazing spectacular deeds!

What do we learn?

- ✓ GOD always raises up a new generation of leaders! GOD uses us to mentor others around us!
- ✓ Friendships are a good thing among sisters and brothers in the Church. Practicing gentleness and kindness over rudeness or gossip—surely goes a long way toward sustaining good friends and relationships among the sisters and brothers, eh?
- ✓ Jesus says to us in John 15—“You are my friends if you do what I command you” which is “to love one another!”

Luke 9:51-62 The VOICE Bible

⁵¹ The time approached for Him to be taken back up *to the Father*; so strong with resolve, Jesus made Jerusalem His destination.

⁵² He sent some people ahead of Him into the territory of the Samaritans, *a minority group at odds with the Jewish majority*. He wanted His messengers to find a place for them to stay in a village *along the road to Jerusalem*. ⁵³ But

because the Samaritans realized Jesus was going to Jerusalem, they refused to welcome them.

James and John (*outraged*): ⁵⁴ Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to destroy these people who have rejected you? [Just as Elijah did.]

Jesus (*turning toward them and shaking His head*): ⁵⁵ you just don't get it. [⁵⁶ The Son of Man didn't come to ruin the lives of people, but He came to liberate them.]

He led them on toward another village. ⁵⁷ Farther along on the road, a man volunteered to become a disciple.

Volunteer: I'll follow you to any destination.

Jesus: ⁵⁸ Foxes are at home in their burrows. Birds are at home in their nests. But the Son of Man has no home. ⁵⁹ You (to another person)—I want you to follow me!

Another Volunteer: *I'd be glad to, Teacher, but let me first attend to my father's funeral.*

Jesus: ⁶⁰ Let the dead bury their dead. I'm giving you a different calling—to go and proclaim the kingdom of God.

A Third Volunteer: ⁶¹ I'll come, Jesus. I'll follow you. But just let me first run home to say good-bye to my family.

Jesus: ⁶² Listen, if your hand is on the plow but your eyes are looking backward, then you're not fit for the kingdom of God.



Apparently Jesus didn't know that he was supposed to take the long way around Samaria on his way to Jerusalem. The practice by the Jews in Jesus' day was to avoid all contact with those Samaritan "lowlifes" who had the nerve to believe that they could worship GOD just as well from their temples as from the big Temple in Jerusalem!

Jesus does have a growing sense of his destiny. Jesus face turns toward Jerusalem—as he heads toward that Holy City to save the world through his sacrifice and death! Jesus deliberately goes through Samaria to get to Jerusalem—because Jesus' purpose includes the Samaritans as well!

Even though the Samaritans treat Jesus coldly and heartlessly—Jesus too had come to save those who had *"received him not."*

So when **James** and **John** see this disrespect by the Samaritans, they ask Jesus if they should call down judgment on the folk—call down fire and brimstone from heaven! These two disciples didn't really understand Jesus' purpose and mission!

Jesus was heading toward heaven to become the ultimate cosmic vessel of grace and mercy to salvation for all. THAT is what the heavens were soon to become thanks to that gracious work of Jesus through his death on the cross.

- ✓ Do we see the GOD of heaven as a gracious and compassionate GOD in Christ?
- ✓ Or do we see GOD as the one holding up a rolled-up newspaper ready and eager to swat and hit us on our heads for every little infraction and bad things we do?

We know what James and John thought. But we also know that Jesus rebuked and admonished them! THEREIN LIES A TRUTH FOR US TO SAVOR, DELIGHT IN, AND TO APPRECIATE ABOUT OUR LORD!

But then in verses 57-62—we have this downright putting-off when it comes to the Kingdom of GOD. Jesus seems now to be rude toward some folks who seem eager to hop onto his kingdom bandwagon. Two people volunteer with earnest zeal to follow Jesus, and a third person is directly called at Jesus' initiation. Their reasons for being rejected—or at least seriously put off—by Jesus vary a little but none of the reasons seems outlandish.

- ✓ Luke 9:57-62 is therefore one of this hyperbolic (*deliberate and obvious exaggeration used for effect*) gospel passages completely metaphoric and an overstatement that we are free to translate into kinder, gentler ideas: translated—this all means that we have to love GOD **MORE** than spouses and children and parents a very great deal indeed!
- ✓ Luke 9 is a reminder of gospel commitment in the midst of our regular and ordinary lives in favor of a gospel-focused ministry that will shove aside all the usual things we do of life.
- ✓ Because it is clear that GOD can and does work through people who own homes and who love their families and who attend funerals of love ones.
- ✓ No, not all believers are called to leave family and home behind—but some are!

Doing the Word

So what is the Word of GOD for us this morning?

1. ONE: WE ARE ALL CALLED TO A RADICAL COMMITMENT TO THE GOSPEL!

So if in the midst of our lives that sometimes mean turning down a promotion, or saying hard things to your children, or denying our families the dream vacation taken by others, or any number of sacrifices we make both great and small in service to the power and beauty of the GOSPEL . . . well, we ought not to be surprised!

BUT HOPE AND GRACE ABOUND AND IS PLENTIFUL!

2. TWO: JESUS' WORDS TODAY INVITE ALL OF US TO CONSIDER OUR VALUES AND PRIORITIES!

- ✓ As followers of Jesus we look forward not backward!
- ✓ As followers of Jesus we need to let go of familiar patterns, social requirements, and relational certainties to experience the greater joy of GOD's realm!
- ✓ We need to let go of vengeance and reprisals in order for us to settle the score!
- ✓ Everything that imprisons us in the past and ties us to habitual reactions need to be jettisoned, thrown away and dumped for GOD's aloha and realm!
- ✓ We are to love without possession, to own without greed, and to save but to give generously and to care for love ones—but break out of patterns that stand in the way of GOD's vision for our lives.

3. THREE: TFCCCH IS TO BECOME A HEALTHY CONGREGATION—ASKING GREAT THINGS OF OURSELVES AND WILLING TO LET GO OF THE PAST TO BE FAITHFUL TO GOD'S MISSION TODAY!

- ✓ Let's put GOD first if GOD is not already first in our lives—and the lives of our families and church!

- ✓ Like Elisha—let's pray for a double-portion of spirit to face today's challenges as a person, as a family, as TFCCCH!
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Sent in the Word

From Fredrick Buechnerⁱ:

"The love for equals is a human thing--of friend for friend, brother for brother, sister for sister. It is to love what is loving and lovely. The world smiles. The love for the less fortunate is a beautiful thing--the love for those who suffer, for those who are poor, the sick, the failures, and the unlovely. This is compassion, and it touches the heart of the world. The love for the more fortunate is a rare thing--to love those who succeed where we fail, to rejoice without envy with those who rejoice, the love of the poor for the rich, of the black man for the white man. The world is always bewildered by its saints!

And then there is the love for the enemy--love for the one who does not love you but mocks, threatens, and inflicts pain. The tortured's love for the torturer.

This is GOD's love.....GOD's love conquers the world."

ⁱ Frederick Buechner (*pronounced BEEK-ner*) is an American writer and theologian. He is the author of more than thirty published books and has been an important source of inspiration and learning for many readers. His work encompasses many genres, including fiction, autobiography, essays, sermons, and other nonfiction. Buechner's books have been translated into twenty-seven languages for publication around the world. Buechner's writing has often been praised for its ability to inspire readers to see the grace in their daily lives.