

Transfiguration 2021

February 14, 2021

1 Kings 2:1-13 Mark 9: 2-9

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How do you know when to let go? If you are a parent, or a caring adult to children or teenagers, you know how that question can come to shape so many interactions. When do you hang on, and when do you let them explore, make their decisions and even leave you?

If you've ever loved someone you couldn't save, you know this question too. As someone makes destructive choices or spirals into addiction, how do you set a boundary to preserve your own sanity?

If you've taken a decisive step in your life sometime, you've mulled this over, haven't you? How do you take that step forward into the unknown and leave behind what is so familiar? Or maybe there was a dream in your life that you so wanted to be *just so* but for whatever reason it didn't or couldn't happen. How do you know when to let go?

The company of prophets didn't use those words as they spoke to Elisha in today's passage--they were more direct: "Don't you know that today the Lord is taking Elijah away from you?" To that, Elisha said in essence "I get it. Shut up." He didn't want to hear that his mentor was no longer going to be around. There was a vulnerability to being a prophet: loving God's people enough to tell them the truth about themselves; which no one really wanted to hear. To have a partner in that meant some safety and comfort--who would want to go it alone?

In fact, Elisha's faithfulness is unrelenting--his words are so like Ruth's from earlier in the Hebrew scripture: "As the Lord lives, I will not leave you," he says. He wants to hang on and hang on until the moment that Elijah disappears. As he looks up into the sky, he tears his clothes as a sign of deep grief....and then he picks up Elijah's mantle--literally a cloak, but figuratively a role or responsibility--and steps into his future. He had to let go of what had been in order to serve God and God's people.

And don't you suppose that he also had to put his trust in God's presence and mercy? He had never done this before by himself. But of course, Elisha had never been by himself at all. I wonder if he recognized in this moment we hear about today the joy--and also the difficulty of placing himself in God's hands.

"Passionate Lutherans" is kind of an oxymoron, isn't it? But we're not all Northern European stoics, and even if some of us are, we do connect our faith and our deepest emotions. For me, those early experiences as a camper at Rainbow Trail infused my faith and the faith of my

friends with a certain fervor. Home again, we would carry our Bibles to church for the first Sunday or two; and as we got older, talk to one another about the changes we were going to make in our lives; and then, well--there was the usual drama with friends and school and so much else we wanted to do that that fervor faded away.

I wonder if you can think of a time in your own faith life like that? If you've had experiences in faith communities, maybe it was during a milestone moment like baptism or confirmation; maybe during a stirring piece of music that you heard or participated in; a mission trip or a youth gathering; a moment or experience when you were moved in some way to let go and surrender yourself to Christ's love, to God's presence in your life (even if you weren't sure what that looked like.)

Often--not always, but often--those moments are hard to sustain, aren't they? We've got plans and responsibilities, the daily-ness of life intrudes and our letting go and letting God becomes more and more difficult. We want to serve, we even long to be faithful, but it is challenging, particularly in a world where following Christ can mean so many different things.

How do you know when to let go? Peter, James, John--all the other disciples, too--had their own ideas about who Jesus was and what he needed to do. Just a few verses earlier in Mark's Gospel, Peter objects to Jesus' path to the cross. He and others believed that the Messiah would conquer the Romans through violence and might, and that they would be there to help Jesus do what *they* knew he should do.

Imagine their surprise on the mountain, seeing Jesus transfigured and standing with the two greatest prophets of the Jewish faith. This was something different than what they had hoped they could manipulate. It was a holy moment quite out of their control that Peter wanted to capture and keep and figure out just what was going to happen next. "This is my Beloved;" says God's voice. "Listen to him." Not "he will listen to your plan," but "Listen to him."

What Jesus had been telling them, and would say again, was that the love of God for all people would be enacted and fulfilled in his journey to the cross. This grace-filled love, the *heart* of God's heart, would be poured out on everyone--even those who tried to control, censor, and kill that love. The way of the world would be turned upside down not through power but overwhelming love. Peter, James, and John--all of them and many more--had to let go of what they were so sure of and be embraced by Jesus. Their eagerness to live in that love and to share it followed.

"Surrender" is what some followers of Jesus call it. Lutherans don't talk too much about that, even though Martin Luther found the center and the joy of his faith through letting go and trusting Jesus. In our baptismal waters we hear *our* name as "Beloved," and are invited to live

out that identity for the rest of our lives. Any moment is the moment for *us* to let go and recognize the love of Jesus that enfolds us.

How do you let go? Maybe this prayer of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, can help us:

I am no longer my own, but yours.
Put me to what you will, place me with whom you will.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be put to work for you or set aside for you,
Praised for you or criticized for you.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and service.
And now, O wonderful and holy God,
Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,
you are mine, and I am yours.
So be it.