

# What to Ask For

2 Kings 2:1–2, 6–14

Luke 9:51–62

Every bookstore in this country has a section devoted to leadership ... I ought to know ...

- I've purchased my share of these books over the years ...
- and I have attended my share of leadership seminars, to boot ...

Yes, we need skillful leaders ... but ... ironically ...

- we must first learn how to follow before we can lead ...
- and Jesus asks us ... first and foremost ... before anything else ... to follow him

What does a good follower need most?

Elisha the prophet shows what followers need in today's Old Testament account of how a fiery chariot swings low and carries the prophet Elijah home to heaven (do you hear the music?) ...

Elijah is the OT prophet *par excellence*

- He has a memorable encounter with God ...
- Speaks truth to power ...
- Advocates for the vulnerable
- Calls down fire ...

And he keeps popping up in the Bible ...

- Malachi 4 says that Elijah will return before the Day of the Lord ...
- In the New Testament, John the Baptist, with his fiery style, reminds people of Elijah ...
- A few verses before today's Gospel lesson, Jesus converses with Elijah and Moses as he is transfigured ...

Luke reports today that Jesus is heading to Jerusalem via Samaritan territory ...

- Samaritan village ... direct route to Jerusalem ... “mixed” people
- The disciples, to their credit, do go when Jesus sends them ...
- When the villagers refuse to welcome them, James and John show righteous anger ...
  - Shall we call down fire, like Elijah did?
  - They are tempted to misuse power
- Jesus doesn’t punish those who resist ... he lets them be ...

Last week, we followed Elijah the prophet as:

- He encountered God in the sound of sheer silence on Mount Horeb ... and
- He was told to get back to work in Samaria

On his way back to work, he recruited Elisha to be his successor.

Elisha teaches us how to be followers and disciples ...

- He doesn’t ask to understand
- He asks for the spirit to guide and energize him, and
- He participates in events

Let’s spend a little time listening to Elisha the Prophet, and consider what he teaches us about discipleship:

- *I was out in the field plowing*
- *Elijah comes up behind me and throws his cloak over my shoulders ... what’s going on?*
- *Elijah ... a man of awesome faith ... who confronted Ahab and his queen Jezebel ... announced a terrible drought ... called fire down from heaven ... ended the drought with a gully-washer ... wants me to follow in his steps?*
- *Years pass ... Elijah’s prophecy that King Ahab and Jezebel would meet disaster comes true ...*
- *Elijah says one morning that the Lord is about to take him, and that the point of departure is in Moab ... on the far side of the Jordan River ...*

- *What an honor for Elijah! ... He will be taken to heaven ... near the spot where Moses died*
- *Am I really to be Elijah's successor? Maybe not ... Elijah tells me three times to let him go forward alone. But I stick with him.*
- *Elijah parts the waters of the Jordan ... as Moses parted the waters of the Red Sea ... he does it with the same mantle that he threw over my shoulders so long ago.*
- *Elijah asks me, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you."*
- *Without thinking, I blurt out: "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit."*
- *Elijah responds: "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."*
- *And I saw him as he was taken up ...*
- *A chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of us, and my fiery teacher Elijah went in a whirlwind into heaven.*
- *Then I saw the mantle ... and picked it up ...*
- *I was to carry on the work of my master Elijah*

Elisha grasped God's will by participating in events:

- He answered Elijah's call and joined him as a disciple
- He went the distance, despite Elijah's testing his loyalty by telling him to turn back
- He picked up the mantle

Like Elisha, we follow what we understand to be God's will, even though we understand only a little at the time.

- This is what Paul means when he writes that
  - "We see through a glass darkly," and that
  - "We work out our salvation with fear and trembling."

What should we ask for as we follow Jesus?

May we ask for a double portion of the Spirit of Jesus as Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit.