

One Step at a Time
2 Kings 2: 1-12 and Mark 9: 2-9
Eastminster Presbyterian Church
February 14, 2021...Transfiguration Sunday

We may know a truth, be told about it once, even a few more times and still not accept it! Elisha was no different. Reliable sources warned him that this was the day that Elijah was to be taken away. Elisha's response, "I know; keep silent." He did not want to hear the inevitable because with it came a bit of fear.

Elijah had mentored Elisha for years for this moment in time. The mantle of leadership would pass now from mentor to student. Elisha's fear was not unfounded. History showed that this nation was not easy to lead. They backslid. Tested God. Tested their leaders. Elisha knew that Elijah will not be around forever. He moved from fear to denial, acceptance, and eventually he moved forward in with courage and purpose. This fear may be justified, but soon Elisha embraced the truth taught him by his mentor, Elijah: courage and confidence come from believing in God's vision and promises.

For all kinds of reasons, we can justify the fears of our time. Or we can embrace the truth of God's vision and promises for a purposeful plan of good and then we can with courage and confidence move forward in faith.

But that is the trick for us is it not? We know the truth. Whatever task God puts before us, God will equip us to do. But knowing the truth and accepting it are two different things. Often fear holds us back and pushes us to do nothing with the opportunities God places before us. But faith over fear calls us to act rather than become paralyzed by indecision, because, as the saying goes: to get anywhere you must take the first step.

Elisha stepped out boldly. His actions did not mean that he did not feel sorrow when Elijah went away. It did not mean that he had all the answers immediately. It did not mean that he would not make mistakes. What it did mean was that by faith in God's purpose for both himself and Elijah, Elisha opened himself up for the changes God had for his life, and not in his own circumstances or his surroundings.

There are so many truths we belief, and yet, like Elisha, we are being called to put feet to those truths. I know there are tasks that God has before me, before you, before us. As followers of our Lord, these are really the only words we need to hear: Listen, says God, not only will I equip you to handle the task, I will not leave you alone.

Peter, James, and John know the truth. It has only been six days since Jesus told his disciples that he was headed to Jerusalem to die. Accepting that truth is a different story. They are fearful of being able to continue the ministry for which they have been equipped. So, what does Jesus say to them? Come on, let us take a walk. And so, they take that first steps. In silence, they walk. That is unusual. James and John were not big fans of being quiet. These siblings leaned toward one-upping each other. Their rumbling passion and energy and competition earned them the nickname, Sons of Thunder. Add bold, brash Peter to the bunch and silence is not the first word

that comes to mind. Peter is known for speaking his mind, often before engaging his brain first. His latest conversation with Jesus must surely be weighing on his mind. He has scolded Jesus for even talking about dying, and looking Peter square in the face, Jesus says, "Get behind me Satan!"

And so, the journey begins, one step at a time. But this time the journey would be different, and they knew that was the truth, but are still struggling with accepting. I imagine Peter feeling like he is dragging a heavy stone up a steep incline. I imagine the brothers on edge because they cannot point out each others' inadequacies. It is a journey to which you and I can relate. Tension between us and people we love and care about makes for a heavy heart. When we are so busy pointing out the faults of others, too often we fail to see good and different gifts they offer. So much of our own noise gets in the way that we often miss what is truly being said. The disciples think their teacher, mentor, Lord has said, "I am leaving you." Scripture does not give specifics, but I imagine the disciples wondering where Jesus is leading them. He has said he is to die at the hands of enemies. Is he running away? Are we helping him escape? Does he have plans for us? And yet, with their uncertainties, in the noise of their own fears, they follow in the footsteps of Jesus. And then the walking stops.

Jesus turns his face toward heaven, and he prays. How often have you stopped suddenly, in the middle of what you were doing, and prayed? You are seeking an answer and after searching scripture, after talking with trusted friends, after thoughtful and careful analysis of all the information, the thing you know you need most is conversation with God. I suspect the three traveling companions were thinking that "at the top" we will talk. But, in a blinding moment Jesus is changed, transfigured right before the eyes of James, John, Peter. Standing with him, pillars of faith, Moses, and Elijah. These disciples, gifted with gab, can do nothing but fall to their knees and worship. They can do nothing but fall silent and listen.

A study of the word "transfigured" in the Greek language produces only four references in the New Testament. In addition to our Mark reading, the word is used in Matthew's version of the transfiguration. Jesus, on that day was changed, transfigured. Fully known as his true self now to Peter, James, and John. Jesus was, is and will ever be the one and only Son of God. When the word "transfigured" appears in the Epistle readings of Romans 12: 12 and 1 Corinthians 3:18 is a bit different. The case ending and action switches to human transfiguring. The case ending in these passages speak to a continuing change, a transformation. In other words, whereas our Triune God is unchanging, we humans are always in a state of being transformed. Transformed and always transforming when we walk in the steps of Jesus. Our time of talking to and listening for the voice of the Lord never ends.

Every so often Jesus calls us away from the crowd to spend time alone with us. He takes us out into the wilderness or up to the mountaintop just so we can be with him. It can be wonderful time, a time when we feel special because he has chosen us, but it can also be a long, silent journey? What can we say to him? What can we say that he does not already know? If we open our mouths, are we afraid of what might come out? So, rather than take the risk, we walk along in silence.

And then that moment comes. Jesus is transfigured. He comes to us in ways we never imagined. A restored relationship. A new relationship. A word of forgiveness. An offering of grace. A sign of hope. There can be no doubt that Jesus, the Son of God has been walking alongside us up and down those mountains. The journey through the valley can be long and hard, but once we have been to the mountain top, as people of faith, nothing will ever be the same.

Peter wanted to stay on the mountain top...which one of us would not prefer that? No more talk of death says Peter and away he goes again, making plans, speaking his mind, blurting out, we are going to build houses for our great teachers and leaders, and we are staying here with you! Then with the boom of thunder that made even the Sons of Thunder quake, God silences Peter and the others again saying, "Listen to my Son." Gone are Elijah and Moses. And to the disciples, Jesus says, "Do not speak of this until the Son of Man is risen from the dead."

The walk back down the mountain is a different kind of silent. They were focused on Jesus, not themselves. Outwardly, they were returning home by the same road, but inwardly the journey had changed. Back in the valley would be the same friends, activities, and temptations. But now, they would see them differently; they would see them through the eyes of Jesus. They would look at all of life with new eyes. No matter where life took them, they could listen for the guiding voice of Jesus. If they would simply stop stepping from time to time, they would always hear these words of their Lord: I will not leave you alone.

With the courage and confidence of faith in Jesus as our Lord, these are the only words we need to hear:" Listen, not only will I equip you to handle the task, I will not leave you alone. Start walking, even if it is one step at a time."