

First Friends Church, a Quaker Meeting
Rev. Dr. Loletta M. Barrett
February 14, 2021
“A Double Share”
2 Kings 2:1-14

Reading

Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel. The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, “Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?” And he said, “Yes, I know; keep silent.”⁴ Elijah said to him, “Elisha, stay here; for the LORD has sent me to Jericho.” But he said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they came to Jericho. The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, “Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?” And he answered, “Yes, I know; be silent.” Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.” But he said, “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them went on. Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground. When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.” Elisha said, “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.” He responded, “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.” As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, “Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, saying, “Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

Message

Elijah is an important figure. His name makes clear who he serves. It means, “My God is Yahweh.”¹ Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Bahai faith hail Elijah as a prophet. The book of Malachi in the Hebrew testament promises Elijah will

¹ Elijah, wikipedia

come as a harbinger of the arrival of the Messiah. In the Jewish tradition, Elijah's name is invoked weekly at Shabbat and at Passover. In the synoptic Gospels people ask if John the Baptist is Elijah. Several miracles attributed to Jesus were first performed by Elijah including resurrection and feeding of multitudes. One interpretation of Elijah's appearance in the story of the transfiguration of Jesus is to prove he is the Messiah.

Elijah defeated King Ahab, Queen Jezebel and Baal's prophets by bringing down fire, and when he ran from their wrath he heard the still small voice of God in the wilderness. He is one of only two people in the Bible to who ascend to heaven instead of dying. One of the points of the story of his ascension was to clearly show Elisha was God's chosen successor for Elijah.

Elisha showed his dedication to Elijah and determination to be his successor by repeatedly refusing to leave Elijah; serving and following him to the end. When Elijah asked him, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you," Elisha answered, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." But it was not Elijah's boon to grant. God had to allow Elisha to see Elijah ascend into heaven. Afterwards Elisha was able to take Elijah's mantle and part the water, just as Elijah had, just as Moses had. The succession was complete and unbroken.

I wondered if Elisha asking for a double share of his teacher's spirit was a reminder of the humility exercised by Solomon who asked God for wisdom. It also made me think about the importance and abundance of teachers in our lives.

Our meeting has been blessed with many Friends with teaching gifts who answered the call to be educators in public schools, colleges, and other settings including our own Whittier Friends school. We have Friends who serve as educators and facilitators in our meeting for our Sunday School or meetings for learning. We have informal evenings and host gatherings where Friends hear presentations. We value the spirit of education, the spirits of educators, the process of mentoring and supporting the growth of each other. Who is it in our meeting that you would ask for a double portion of their spirit?

Each of us has had experiences with teachers in our lives including formal education. But there have also been parents, and other family members, music, dance and art teachers, coaches, neighbors, work supervisors and colleagues and many, many others. We value the spirit of education, the spirit of educators, the process of mentoring and supporting our growth. Who is it in your life experience that you would ask for a double portion of their spirit?

There are people whose journey intersects with ours for a short time. There are people who walk alongside us for a lifetime. They are partners, spouses, neighbors, friends and Friends. When we hold a celebration of life here we ask all

those in attendance to tell us the story of how their lives have been touched and influenced. Then we can see, acknowledge, confirm and support the legacy the person has given them to carry forward. We value the process of mentoring and supporting our growth. Whose legacy do you carry that you would ask for a double portion of their spirit?

February is Black History month. Our Understanding through Sharing group took the opportunity to explore the life of a black person we did not know well and share it with the group. The purpose was not only to learn about a new person but share what we learned about ourselves in the process. Why did we pick that person to learn about? There are many, many “hidden figures” in our history and present day that we need to explore and celebrate. We all have read stories about others whose lives are examples, biographies that give us insight into the experience of others, and even fictional tales about lives that inspire us. We value their spirits, what their lives have to offer us in challenge, inspiration and encouragement for growth. Whose story inspires you such that you would ask for a double portion of their spirit?

Art, literature, spirituality and music are other teachers of note. We experience new images of reality as well as commentary and beauty that touch our hearts and activate different parts of our brains. This form of teaching can be active

or passive but nonetheless changes and influences our lives profoundly. How has the spirit of these teachers informed and formed who you are?

In addition to the teachers who take human, literary and artistic form, there are our animal and nature teachers. These friends unveil a part of creation that brings a different perspective on life and its meaning. To look in the eyes of a companion animal, to view a sunset, to hear birdsong, to watch a tree or plant grow or sway in the wind can open us to insights about ourselves and God which no human teacher can do. How have these teachers opened you to seek a double portion of their spirit?

Sometimes if we listen well we hear wisdom from the most surprising sources. We have an abundance of wonderful teachers. Someone or something we have little connection to or we don't usually hear insight from. Someone or something we don't expect to know or understand what we are going through or what is happening. Someone or something who speaks a profound Truth simply, innocently and with deep integrity. Sometimes if we listen well, we hear the still small voice. Who has exhibited Spirit such that you want or need to ask for a double portion of their spirit?

Every once in a while I hear myself say something I know is Spirit speaking through me, or is at least spirit inspired. Sometimes I even say something that is inspired by my own spirit, life experience, wisdom that has been a hard won gift-

mainly because I had to learn it the hard way. Sometimes I overlook the fact that while God is not yet finished with me, God doesn't expect me to be perfect, I'm the one with that problem. God has given and loves my very own spirit.

God chose Elisha to be Elijah's successor but Elisha had already committed his whole life to serving God. Elisha's name means "My God is salvation." He is venerated as a prophet in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Bahai faith.

According to the stories, Elisha performed twice as many miracles as Elijah.²

We can spend a lot of time looking for others who can teach us, mentor us, or be our inspiration. Sometimes we just need to seek a double portion of God's Spirit. When we do, sometimes, very surprisingly and very amazingly we come to realize that as we keep growing we actually come to want a double portion of our own spirit. And when we do, others will want it too.

² Elisha, Wikipedia