



Take Up the Story

Elijah comes to the end of his prophetic work and is taken up into heaven. Elisha's leadership is affirmed in picking up Elijah's mantle. We hear God's story from our ancestors in the faith and in turn pass that faith along to others. Our call is to claim the mantle God gives us and follow Jesus as faithful disciples, guided by the Spirit.

Focus Scripture: 2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14

The prophet Elijah is coming to the end of his ministry, and has begun a farewell tour of prophetic centres. Elijah tries to send disciple Elisha away, but Elisha refuses to leave. They travel to shrines at Gilgal and Bethel, and then make their way to the Jordan River. They are accompanied at a distance by a band of 50 others of the "company of prophets," a group of prophets under Elijah's leadership.

Elijah's action of striking the water with his rolled-up mantle – probably something like a shawl or loose-fitting garment – recalls the action of Moses (Exodus 14:15-31) when the waters divide to allow Israel to escape slavery in Egypt. Elijah and Moses are seen as the two great figures in Israel's history. In the New Testament, they represent the Law and the prophets. Elijah is seen as the forerunner of the Messiah.

Elisha has the courage to ask for a double share of Elijah's spirit. A "double share" was the portion of the inheritance given to the firstborn and heir. Elisha hopes that he will receive this affirmation of leadership, so that he can carry on Elijah's work for God, proclaiming God's word. In like manner, other ancestors in the faith have handed down the faith to others and finally to us, so that we might pass it on to those who come after us.

Elijah is carried up to heaven in the whirlwind. In the Hebrew Scriptures, only Enoch before him (Genesis 5:24) did not die. Elisha bravely picks up the mantle, the symbol of Elijah's prophetic call. What does it cost Elisha to pick it up, knowing that he is taking on the difficult task of confronting kings and officials with the word of judgment God was speaking? Taking up Elijah's mantle involves challenge as well as promise. For Elisha there can be no turning back.

Elisha is able to part the Jordan River, a sign that he has inherited Elijah's spirit, and he crosses back to the other side. The 50 other prophets have watched the whole thing. What might they be thinking as events unfolded? Perhaps they are wondering what kind of a leader Elisha will be.

"Where is God?" the psalmist asks in **Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20**. Verses

16-18 echo the description of the whirlwind in Elijah's story. God works wonders and is powerful over the world of nature.

In **Luke 9:51-62**, Jesus and the disciples are on the journey to Jerusalem. The disciples, angry when a village does not welcome them, want to call down fire from heaven, an echo of the Elijah story in 2 Kings 1:9-12. Jesus shows them a new way, teaching them, and us, to love our enemies. Jesus reminds us of the cost of picking up the mantle of discipleship. Other loyalties must be set aside, and there can be no turning back when we make a commitment to follow Jesus.

Paul in **Galatians 5:1, 13-25** spells out what it means to pick up the mantle of discipleship. We are called to live by the Spirit, giving up "the works of the flesh" and letting God's love speak through us in our care for our neighbours.

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There are many kinds of leadership and many opportunities to serve as followers. Like Elisha, we follow others from whom we have learned about God. Who are the faith ancestors who have helped you understand the Christian faith? By our baptism, we are called to pick up the mantle of discipleship. Where do you experience the challenge and cost of responding to God's call? Where do you experience the promise?

