

Both of our Scripture passages this morning talk about

what churchly folk describe as “calls.”

But, neither are exactly direct calls

of the sort we often think of,

like when Samuel, the first prophet in the Old Testament,

was called by God as a youth serving Eli, the priest, at Shiloh,

or as when Paul was on the road to Damascus

and was struck blind by his encounter with the risen Jesus.

And, in our two texts today,

there is also a parallel and a contrast in the responses

by the person acting on the “call.”

It’s unspoken as to whether any of the three people

who approach or are approached by Jesus

that each actually follow Him.

On the other hand,

we hear how Elisha responds

to the non-anointing by Elijah —

he burns his plow and roasts his cows...

There might be some who say

that Elisha’s action was a bit extreme.

But, how do we respond to God’s call?

Do we up and leave our homes and livelihood?

Do we make excuses for why we can’t act at that time?

Are we afraid of what will happen

if we do acknowledge (or reject) the call?

And, does such fear limit us

or motivate us?

You recall that God assigned Elijah to accomplish three things  
after the encounter on Mt. Horeb —  
anoint two new kings over Israel  
and its neighboring country to the east,  
and to anoint Elisha as his successor.

Some folk take these tasks as a prioritized list —  
replace the two kings first (especially Ahab),  
then line up the replacement for God's prophet.

Spoiler Alert:  
things don't turn out in that order.

We often make big plans.  
We think that those plans are S.M.A.R.T.;  
that is, they are Specific,  
Measurable,

Achievable,  
Realistic,  
and Timely,  
(or Time-bound).

We have come to believe  
that all we have to do is lay out  
those five criteria  
and everything will fall into place —  
Ta-Dah!

We Did It!  
And, while I'm not saying that such effort is for naught,  
life sometimes happens in a different order;  
sometimes God changes (or allows a change)  
in the plans.

We see this with Elijah.

On his way to anoint two new kings,

he comes across Elisha plowing on his family's farm.

In a seemingly off-hand gesture — surely not a formal anointing —

Elijah throws his mantle over the hard-working farmer.

Elisha runs after the older man

and conditionally commits to following the prophet.

Elijah seems then to rebuff the commitment,

but Elisha follows through with his good-byes

as well as his promise.

When we are presented with the unexpected,

are we open to acting on such an opportunity?

The pandemic has put a proverbial wrench

in a lot of people's plans.

Not just vacations,

but how and where we work,

shop,

gather for worship

and family and communal fellowship.

Many people see a major shift happening

in how our life together will unfold

in the near future

as well as an understandable concern

about what the recent past and current events,

decisions,

and actions will have

on our families —

ourselves, our children,

our grandchildren, and our great-grandchildren,

as well as on our communities,

our neighbors, and our leaders.

To whom will the mantle we wear be passed?

In our Old Testament reading,

the Biblical scholars and preachers who selected today's verses  
left out three lines.

After God had given Elijah his new tasks,

God tells Elijah that those who had followed Ba'al would perish.

And, there seems to be a lot of them

because it will take two kings plus Elijah's successor  
to scourge the land of those who turned away from God.

Yet, not everyone would be put to the sword —

as always, God promises a remnant will survive.

It's both that promise

and the intention by God to provide a successor for/to us  
that allows us to continue working  
for the achievement of God's kin-dom.

I suspect that as zealous as Elijah was as God's prophet —  
even renewed at Horeb —

he might well have thought

that he was done, defeated, denied,  
and denigrated by the people.

Yet, God still had work for him to do;

if only to find others and pass the mantle.

We are challenged on many fronts, like I said.

Looking around the pews in our church,  
we see our faith-filled neighbors and friends.

And, we wonder, perhaps like Elijah,

who will come after?

Who will do the work we have done and continue to do?

It would be easy if we heard God's word to us

that identified those who would take up our mantles.

But, rather than wring our heads,

or throw up our hands in the air

because we don't know who it is or will be,

we need to be out and about,

keeping our eyes open for the person or persons.

I said last week that Elijah had walked

from the northern kingdom of Israel to Mt. Horeb

in the southern kingdom of Judah

to encounter God —

an estimated distance of 300 miles.

He then had to walk back.

It was on his way back into Israel

that he found Elisha.

Will we undertake the journey

to find those to whom we can pass our mantles?

I pray we can.

**Let us pray:** God of all time, place, deeds, and people, we turn again to listen for Your comforting and challenging word. Help us to seek it, to hear it, to follow it — even when it may be confusing, disheartening, disturbing. By the power of the Holy Spirit, strengthen our resolve to be Your people, to do Your work of love, grace, mercy, peace, and hope for all. Point out to us those who will join us in Your efforts to make Your kin-dom visible and present. Move their hearts to take up the mantle when passed and to be the visible and ongoing agents of all that You have done, are doing, and will do in, through, and as Christ Jesus, Your Son, the Savior of the world. Amen.

