

06/27/10—Avondale—Meute

“On to Greater Things”

II Kings 2: 1-2, 6-14; **Luke 9: 51-62**

Pearl: The high calling of being a follower of Christ.

Function: To move worshippers to aspire to higher commitment to the life with Jesus the Christ.

Elisha was an ambitious protégé of Elijah.

1. Elisha did not shy away from the rigors of being a prophet of God.
 - a. Elijah gave him the chance repeatedly. Reminds one of Ruth with Naomi. Naomi wanted her to leave her and find a man and get on with her life rather than stay with her.
 - i. Repeatedly Elisha insisted on staying with the great prophet.
 - b. Elijah knew the rigors of the prophetic office. Elijah is considered one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament and yet he did not have a rosy career. Even after his great victory over the prophets of Baal he went and hid for fear of the retribution of Jezebel. Elijah had great highs and lows in his service for the Lord. So he wanted his young protégé to be sure of his intent.
2. What was behind Elisha’s ambition? We find out in what he requested of Elijah: “He asked for a double portion of Elijah’s spirit.” In other words, he asked that the life of Elijah be repeated in his life. That is why I said Elisha was ambitious! That was asking a lot!
 - a. Elijah told him that if he saw him being taken up into heaven then his request was granted. In fact, Elisha did see this amazing event and so it was that Elisha entered into the high voltage life of a prophet of God.
3. There are times in life when we all have great ambition.
 - a. A young man joined the Marines. He left the family farm and, during what ought to be the very best, fun years of his life, enlisted in the Marines. Why did he do it? What attracted him to the rigors of basic training and boot camp? Was it his sense of patriotism? Was it his

desire to give back something to the land that had given so much to him? No, he said that none of these factors motivated him. What propelled him toward the Marines was, “I wanted to be tested. All my life I’ve gotten by easy. Nobody ever demanded much of me at home or in school. I think that maybe my parents and teachers didn’t think I had much ability or talent. I wanted to be somewhere that people believed in me enough to demand big things out of me. I wanted to show what I was made of. That’s why I joined the Marines” (“Pulpit Resource,” June 2010, p. 60).

- i. I guess we can assume that his church did not also demand much of him if he was a part of a church body.

At a certain point Jesus “set his face” for Jerusalem. We read that in the reading from the gospel of Luke. This notion of having “his face set” was repeated so you get the notion that Jesus was stepping up his urgency and zoning in on his mission. He was gazing ahead and fixing his eye on the end.

1. He cast his eyes on Jerusalem. This meant that he was looking ahead to the cross.
 - a. When they then entered into Samaria and it was evident that he was headed for Jerusalem this is part of why the Samaritans rejected him and didn’t want to have anything to do with him. The Samaritans did not view Jerusalem as the holy city but instead viewed Mt. Gerazim as the holy site. This was a major point of disagreement between Jews and Samaritans who had no love for each other.
 - b. This is what kindled the passion of James and John who wanted to call down fire from heaven upon them for their cold reception of Jesus.
2. The point is that Jesus was narrowing his focus and fixing his gaze and his mind upon his ultimate mission. In so doing he invited others to join him in his gospel mission. Not only did he invite others to join him but many enlisted in his cause when they saw his ambition. And this is why we know

just how demanding is the call of Christ upon those who believe in him and seek to follow him as a disciple.

- a. Jesus wishes that everyone enlist in his cause. But he also wants all who join with him to count the cost and be willing to make his cause a very high priority. In fact, he bids us make it the very highest priority in our lives. “Jesus gave his all, all to him we owe,” goes the hymn. To those who did not catch the high priority of his invitation he suggested that they adjust their priorities.
 - i. One said, “First let me go and bury my father.”
 - ii. Another said, “I will follow you wherever you go.”
 - iii. The other said, “First let me say farewell to those at my home.”
 - b. Now some of those are very natural and you would think appropriate things to do before going on the road with Jesus. Yet Jesus let them know that they cannot hesitate—they cannot be distracted by any other concern (noble though they may be)—they were being invited into the life of Christ which is no picnic or cakewalk.
3. The life with Christ is a high voltage, high intensity, high commitment way of life. It demands our all. He demands our total concentration. He demands our full focus and attention. This passage in Luke begins a section which contains many high challenge statements from our Lord. Let me review some of them.
- a. **Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing** (10. 41-42).
 - b. **Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters** (11. 23).
 - c. **From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded** (12. 48b).

- d. **Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple** (14. 26-27). In this time “hate” did not carry the same kind of emotion that it does today. This was a statement about priority and not to disregard family and treat them harshly or badly.
 - e. **Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it** (17. 33).
 - f. **There is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life** (18. 29-30).
4. Our Lord is gracious and kind and loving in every way. At the same time he is demanding of us. He does not understate the magnitude of his Way. He does not equivocate. He does not try to put a positive spin on the calling to be his follower. It is a hard life. It is a challenging life. The life with Christ requires our very all.
- a. The Christian life is just perfect for what that young man who joined the Marines was looking for. “I wanted to be where people believed in me enough to demand big things out of me,” he said. This is precisely what the call of Christ is all about.
5. Following Jesus will bring you the opportunity for “greater things!” You are about to hear from a young woman, Caitlin McMahon, who is aspiring to a short-term (9 month) mission experience because as she explained to me: **“I have felt God’s call to do something different, out of the ordinary, and to not waste my youth, so I have put graduate school on hold. I am very excited about this opportunity to completely trust God and to be able to share the Gospel in a very real way to the people of Central African Republic.”** (Segue into Caitlin’s Mission presentation)

(Optional continuation)

We are invited by our Lord to follow him. He invites us all. Yet he makes us aware of the high calling that it is to be a disciple of Jesus the Christ.

1. He likes zealous followers.
 - a. Yet he needs us to have the right spirit. James and John were offended for their Lord when the Samaritans rejected him. They became enraged and asked Jesus if they should call fire from heaven down upon them. Jesus couldn't believe his ears and he rebuked them—"Of course not!"
 - b. Jesus needs highly committed and passionate followers but he does not need terrorists!
2. There are believers today who would be ready to call down fire from heaven upon other people. This is not the spirit of Christ Jesus. This is not the kind of fire which Jesus wants kindled.
 - a. He wants a fire kindled in our hearts which is for those who are on the margins.
 - b. He wants fire kindled in our hearts that would lead to compassionate caring.
 - c. He wants a fire kindled in our hearts for justice and fairness for all.
 - d. The kind of fire that he kindles by his spirit is a fire which exposes prejudice and racism. It exposes greed and hypocrisy. It exposes liars and posers. It is a fire which illumines and exposes selfishness.

These are the greater things which Christ bids us to be about.

1. Caitlin McMahon is here today to tell us about her aspiration to "greater things" and our invitation to join with her in support. (Invite Caitlin forward to share in the Mission Highlight).