

**Epiphany 7**  
**February 19, 2012**  
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I've always loved the story of Elijah's departing, and the passing of prophetic mantle. That passing is important – a way of saying “this might look like the end of something really big and important, but actually it's a moment of great transition.” A prophet might pass, riding off into the sunset, as it were, in a thunder of hooves and chariots, but the prophetic office continues; the power of the prophet is firmly in place in the life of Elisha. We often miss that – we focus on Elijah when the story's really about the Prophetic Voice that Elijah carried. That Prophetic Voice, the author says, doesn't end with the death or even ascension of one particular figure, but it is available for all who choose to carry on that tradition.

The author of this text wants us to notice something else, too: how much Elijah and Elisha are like Moses and Joshua. It's difficult to miss when the waters are parted! And just as Moses died opposite Jericho with Joshua prepared to enter into the land, so too is Elijah taken up, with Elisha prepared to return to the land.

The storyteller wants his readers to see that parallel, and wonder, in their own time, what is coming into being, what momentous transition is about to happen or is actually already happening in their lives.

Later, 1<sup>st</sup> Century readers will be invited to see in someone else a similar connection with both Moses and Elijah, to recognize another example of the prophetic voice in action, and be wonder for themselves in their own time, what is coming into being, what momentous transition is about to happen or is actually already happening in their lives.

But let's not get there too soon! The intended connection between Moses and Elijah, and more particularly the moment when that connection is made, is really important for us. In some sense, every community of faith stands opposite Jericho with a mantle before it. Occasionally, in rare moments, those who have glimpsed upward and seen the whirlwind of God are compelled to bend down and pick up that mantle, believing that now is the moment for them to strike the waters. That's a challenge to us: are we willing to look into the whirlwind? And are we willing to live as though it has changed us?

Without that willingness it will be very hard to see what is coming into being, to see what momentous transition is about to happen or is actually already happening in our lives.

As we come to the end of the season of Epiphany so today's Old Testament reading invites us to ask ourselves about our willingness to look into the whirlwind of God and decide if we're willing to pick up the mantle of change.

Looking into the whirlwind AND living as though it has changed us is a lot like looking into the cloud and living as though it has changed us. That, anyway, was the challenge to Peter and James and John.

Yes, now we're up a mountain – a “thin place” for sure. Peter, seeing Moses and Elijah, understands this moment as another “parting-the-water freedom-from-slavery” moment, as in the Old Testament reading. He gets it partly right: the Feast of Booths commemorated that Exodus, after all, so why not do it again? Why not build booths?

The answer is that Peter's getting ahead of himself – and ahead of Jesus – and making assumptions. He's assuming that it will all happen the same way, marching into the promised land. This time it will be the Romans melt before them! “God's reign is a done deal”, he's thinking, “God's glory has broken through for good. God will now pitch God's tent on earth....”. Peter was probably thinking other thoughts, too. He was assuming that – as in the past – such a “breakthrough” moment was not only religious but political, too. Such a moment would require organization and, especially, Leadership. “Conveniently”, Peter's right there to step up to the plate, to assume responsibility as the Messiah's consigliere... There's work to be done, and Peter's mind is on the glory of the mountaintop, not suffering and loss. He wants to see booths raised, not a cross. When Jesus silences him things don't seem to be fitting together the way he expected Discipleship shouldn't be about suffering and loss.....

There's a reason why Mark puts this story here. He's giving us a glimpse of glory right now because what follows is decidedly not about joy and celebration but about suffering and death.

And he's doing it because in some way it reflects our lives. On the whole they're not made up with continual visions of glory. In fact our walk of discipleship will likely offer only glimpses of what is to come. Discipleship means we live with ambiguity; we live – have to live – by faith while trusting the One who promises.

And the last thing of note about today's gospel is another echo – mountain top, cloud, Divine Voice...ring any bells?! Moses and Yahweh and the giving of The Instruction (often inaccurately translated “The Law”). This is a second set of instructions, and the bearer is Jesus.

How Jesus makes his journey, and what he says and does on that journey, constitute the content of the Second Instruction and they supercede the first – or, perhaps, bring the first to it's zenith, narrowing down the focus to the two great commandments and their meaning.

Today marks another step forward on that journey for each of us as individuals and all of us as a community. In Lent – beginning on Wednesday – we have an opportunity to figure out exactly what all this means for us and our faith.