

“If not us, then who?”

February 26, 2006

Text: 2 Kings 2:1-12, Matthew 25:31-46

I.

If your life is anything like my life—and no doubt it is—there are some things in life that you have to do. Simply put, there’s nobody else. There are times and situations when *it’s up to us*. **If not us, then who?**

Often times it has to do with family matters ... with aging parents ... or troubled children, or grandchildren. *There are some things we have to do.*

Whether it’s at home or at work or in community life, given the intricacies and complexities of the situation (with all of the personalities involved), no one else can do it. It’s up to us. Rain or shine—we’re the one.

Every generation has its realm of responsibilities and duties with regard to the past and the future. There are certain traditions that are worthy to be carried on. They’re important to us as a part of our identity.

There are certain values and commitments that we want to promote and pass on ... that we want our children and grandchildren to embody and reflect in their own lives.

For example, Christianity and the story of our faith. That’s why we bring our children to church and enroll them in Sunday School. We want to pass on our religious traditions to them. If we don’t do it, who will? **If not us, then who?**

All the time in life, things are being passed on. Leadership is being passed on. Leaders can’t live forever. Voices for justice and peace are being passed on. And sometimes we are the ones they are being passed on to.

Like it or not, sometimes we awaken to a world where *it’s up to us*. Stuff has happened, people have moved on, and now it’s on our plate. If we don’t do it, it’s not going to happen.

II.

This was the prophet Elisha’s experience in our reading this morning from 2 Kings 2. Elisha, of course, was a disciple of Elijah, the mysterious and enigmatic 9th century prophet many thought would return from on high and pave the way for the advent of God’s Messiah.

All sorts of magical powers were attributed to Elijah. But now his time on earth was ending and the mantle of his prophetic powers was being passed on to trusting disciple, Elisha. Understandably, however, Elisha was more than a little uneasy about this transition.

He was feeling the pressure; like becoming the Miami Dolphins starting quarterback after the retirement of Dan Marino. Or becoming the new shooting guard for the Chicago Bulls after Michael Jordan.

Elisha wasn't ready for the change. He wasn't ready to step up and be God's A-team prophetic voice after Elijah was gone. When we're about to fill someone else's shoes in any area of responsibility, often times, there's a sense that we're not ready.

We think there's more we need to learn, or more conversations we need have people that know. Straight away, we need more time; or at least, we think we do.

No doubt, Elisha's self doubts were many. He couldn't help but compare himself to Elijah. And Elijah had all of these spiritual and magical powers.

Before Elijah's departure, standing by the river Jordan, right there in Elisha's presence, Elijah takes out his mantle, strikes the river waters and immediately the waters part to one side and to the other. And together, they walked across to the other side.

Elisha has gotta be thinking to himself: *How am I ever going to pull that off?*

The bottom line for Elisha is that he's in no hurry for Elijah to leave. He's not sure he can carry on. What's he going to do? And then as the *horses and chariots of fire* carry Elijah, in a whirlwind, off to heaven, Elisha is overwhelmed with a sense of inadequacy.

And yet, he knows, now: **it's up to him**. The prophetic mantle has been passed on. He's received Elijah's special blessing, a double share of his spirit. And now the truth of Elisha's life really hits home: *If not me, who? And if not now, when? I'm the one. It's up to me!*

III.

In a real sense, friends, this is our human situation. Always, all about us there are problems. People of all stripes—sometimes family and friends—struggling with all kinds of issues and challenges.

Think of the prayer requests we bring before God every week ... and then the larger problems around the world and here at home in the United States.

In many instances, no doubt, we can't help much. We simply don't have the expertise or the resources, to say nothing of time considerations.

Other times, it's simply out of our league ... like the continued nightmare that is the war in Iraq ... where civil war is all but a foregone conclusion, now, in the wake of the recent rash of mosque bombings on both sides—the Shiites and the Sunnis.

And then there's the AIDS crisis in Africa ... to say nothing of our problems with education and Health Care, and even poverty right here in the United States.

Did you know that Miami is the 3rd poorest city in the nation, behind Detroit and El Paso. And that right here in Miami, actually at the University of Miami (Miami-Dade's largest, single employer), the janitor workers are trying to organize in the face of many obstacles.

1. CHECK IT OUT: the median household income in Miami-Dade County is \$36,000, far below the national average. Even still, the wages of some of the janitors at UM are less than \$15,000 a year.
2. Our church is a member of the South Florida Interfaith Committee on Worker Justice who are actively organizing supporters to stand in solidarity with these workers. In our church, as the spirit moves and as time allows, we try to do what we can to be supportive of *worker rights* issues.

Again, **If not us, then who? And if not now, when?**

The point is, we live in a world that is bombarded by one challenge after another. And at the end of the day, we all have something we can do, something we can give; perhaps not financial or material, but something of our mind, our heart, our spirit ... our hands our feet.

We are all endowed with gifts—gifts that are intended by our Creator God to be used to help realize God's purposes. And every day, the invitation sounds out over all the earth for all the world to hear: **If not us, then who? And if not now, when?**

As the chariot of fire carried Elijah off to the heavens, Elisha was left with the sobering awareness that *now it would be up to him. He would be the prophetic voice of the Lord.* This was a daunting challenge. Again, **if not us, who? And if not now, when?**

IV.

Our CROP WALK today to combat world hunger is but a reminder of the tremendous needs that exist around the world ... and, as we've seen, even right here in the Miami area.

I know that some of you here today have more than your share of worries and deeply-felt concerns as well.

The challenge of the church, in our WALK today and beyond, is to be Christ's hands and feet, Christ's eyes and heart in community. The challenge of the church—always—is to stand with the poor, the needy, the heart-broken, the infirmed ... the little ones, the vulnerable ones ... the ones who, if we were not to stand with them, would stand alone.

For in the gripping and emotionally-charged **final judgment** scripture in Matthew 25, a vision of compassion and heart-wrenching love, our faith invites us:

Come, you that are blessed by God, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;

*For I was hungry and you gave me food ...
I was thirsty and you gave me drink ...
I was a stranger and you welcomed me ...
I was naked and you clothed me ...
I was sick and in prison and you visited me ...*

And then the faithful people of God will answer: **Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you drink? When was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and clothed you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? When did we do this?**

And God will say to them ... and to us today:

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me!

V.

Friends, as Christians, let us be challenged today by the human cries and tears that touch our common lives. And let us respond, as Christ would respond and truly be the Church in his name.

For **If not us, then who.** And **If not now, when?**

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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