

## DECISION

Texts on Sunday, July 1, 2007

*2 Kings 2: 1-14*

*Luke 9: 51-62*

The stories you have heard this morning are master/disciple stories. They tell of the paradox of decision in the disciple, whether to rise and to follow, or to stay. This decision comes all in a moment. On this point, the evangelicals' focus on being "born again" is right; they have a clearer understanding of decision in a moment than have most other Christians. What they often get wrong, and what humans generally get wrong, is that the decision needed in the present moment does not depend on any decision from long ago. You must be born again, yes—but now, in the moment, in the crisis you are confronting. This is the gateway to eternity: the infinite in a moment.

If you think, "There is no crisis I am confronting, there is no great decision needed now in my life," it simply means that for now, your discipleship is dormant. This is not a bad thing, but let us see it clearly. If you do not hear a present call to rise and follow, then you have no master; you are your own master in the place where you have decided to rest. To you the master says, "Elisha, remain here." When a teacher tells a student to remain behind, what does it mean? It means he is not ready to go on, doesn't it? This is not a bad thing. If you aren't ready, the bad thing would be to go on, unprepared. The sad thing about Americans, and especially American Christians, is that they resist the distinction, spiritual preparedness. They want to pretend that after the grade levels of youth are complete, there are no more levels of maturity to master; everyone is the same; everyone is a disciple; there is no inner crisis, no decision needed. This is tragic nonsense. For most of us, most of the time, discipleship is dormant. We have no master but ourselves. When the master has said, "You stay here, for I am called on further," most of us, most of the time, simply say, *Okay*. Wasn't that obedience, to do what the teacher said? We were not ready to leave the ordinary religion.

But your master's command is not a simple command like those given to soldiers and slaves. When your master speaks to you inwardly, it is like a voice at your bedside in the night. Can you even hear it? Not always, for you are so weighed down by your emotions in a kind of sleep. You are angry, or you are afraid; you are dutiful, you are dependable, you are self-pitiful, or you are sad . . . The list is endless, isn't it? Don't go guilty; we are all in this list. But it all means one thing: Whatever complaint keeps rising to your lips or to your thoughts, that is your master and that master is the source of your basic misery, whatever it is.

But sometimes—I can't explain it, we must call it grace—sometimes you do awake in the night to your true master's voice. The words may be, "Stay here, Elisha," but now you hear in them the call to decision. Are you ready to follow? Are you ready this instant to not rehearse your tiresome grievance, but to let it go in the grace of a prayer? Now? Are you ready this instant to not go to the refrigerator, if you are among those who try to eat their way out of unhappiness? Are you ready this instant to not leave the hard talk your beloved needs you to stay in? Are you ready now to not go to the cabinet, for whatever potion you prefer to this pain? Are you ready to stay awake to the voice you have heard, and do nothing, but call with your whole mind and heart and strength to your master with a word of complete attention. This is prayer. This is the disciple's decision.

It's strange: If you are waiting to be told that you are ready to go on, you are not ready to go on. The understanding or vision which has not arisen in you yet cannot be given you by your master. Discipleship is not a passive relationship; it is pure attention to whatever is really before you now. Sometimes, in the master's voice—*Elisha, stay here*—you hear the test of your readiness which the

master is also always offering. And then, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, you decide: “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” I am ready to grow; I am ready to go.

Now you will follow the master down, down to the river, and over Jordan. On the way, the master will test you, often. In Bethel: Stay here, Elisha. In Jericho: Stay here, Elisha. This story cannot say what a life’s work of growth and development this is, but see the direction of the master’s call: He is called east, and further east. He is going to the Jordan, to the far edge of the known land, the holy and beloved land. He is going to leave all that is known of religion and tradition, of safety and ordinary friendship. He is going to cross over to the other side in the power of God’s utterly free, liberating Exodus from bondage; divided waters to the new land, unknown land, land of the enemy. In spite of so much unknown, the disciple, now awake, decides: “As the Lord lives, and as you your self live, I will not leave you.”

Are you ready to decide, to pass over from *your* crisis into a new land? This is the gateway to eternity: the infinite in a moment. This is the gift of the Last Supper, the Holy Communion, that you and I, who are infinitely hungry and infinitely incapable of satisfaction from any of all the sumptuous fare the whole world can provide, can decide in the sign of the bread and the cup to awake to our crisis—for even today, the Lord God will take your master away from you. Yes, you know. In the breaking of the body, in the outpouring of the blood, you can say, “I will not leave you.”

If you are awake in your discipleship — not one of us always is — you may boldly ask to inherit a double portion of your master’s spirit. This may be granted you, it may not—but it is right to desire so much, to ask for the power of full and glorious attention to the world that is, actually before you. Then, in the power of God like that given to Elisha, you can ask, *Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?* and bring down upon the waters that separate your good and evil, your friend and foe, your religion and unreligion the mighty mantle that is left to you, and cross over on dry land to minister to your sleeping people, and to speak to them in the night the word they may hear for decision.

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