

This has been some week....

Gracious God, May these words be your words of grace. Amen

This has been some week, hasn't it? The Supreme Court has been busy. We first hear that the Voting Rights Act has been gutted....because racism really doesn't exist any more in the United States? I wish that were true. We are a country that continues to struggle with this ugly disease of racism...and will continue to struggle with it. Racism is so much a part of the fabric of our culture....we have tried to stain stick it out....white wash it, but there is too much evidence all around us to ignore.

We have heard that the Defense of Marriage Act has been ruled unconstitutional. And I cried tears of joy...finally, finally. What a crazy week.

The question that has continued to haunt me is what are the church's responses to what is happening in our culture here and now? We change. Our world changes...God journeys with us and loves us in all those changes...God's unwavering words continues to anchor us. "Love the Lord your God...love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus' ministry of acceptance and love for absolutely everyone guides us. God's healing grace through Jesus' ministry guides us. I believe that the church not only is a place of nurture, it is also a place and community of prophecy. We are called to speak God's truths of compassion, inclusively, grace, hope and broad love. Our country for so long has gotten caught up in apathy. We shrug our shoulders and say, "What can you do?" George Bernard Shaw said, "The apposite of love isn't hate. It is indifference." If we lose ourselves to indifference, we are doing exactly the opposite of what God is calling us to do.

We are called to be prophets. Prophets don't have crystal balls....they are not psychics...The original Hebrew word for prophet means "mouth piece of God." Prophets spoke for God in their time and place. We are called to speak the love of God in THIS TIME and PLACE. I grow weary of hearing people say that we are going to hell because....well, fill in the blank – they have made a long list. No, No, I believe it is time for us to boldly declare that God is still speaking in glorious and powerful ways.

The path to being a prophet doesn't happen with just the snap of a finger. We are called to take a journey much like Elijah and Elisha's. I love that Elisha wasn't going to leave Elijah for one moment on his journey. "As long as God lives and you live, I will not leave you", he said, each time Elijah encouraged him to stay put. He was in it for the long haul. We too are called to faithfully take the whole journey.

1. Go to Bethel – Think of the prophets that we have known or do know: Martin Luther King Jr, Ghandi, Sojowoner Truth, Nelson Mandela, and Mary Magdalene. They have all gone to a spiritual place called Bethel at some point in their lives. Let me explain. Bethel was named by Jacob when he experienced the heavens open up. He named the place Bethel – meaning "House of God" because he had experienced God's very presence in that place. Authentic prophets take

- their stand because they have experienced the very presence of God. Their passion, determination, and conviction come from a household where God lives and breathes and moves. We are called to a place in our lives where we are receptive to God's real presence.
2. Head onto Jericho – The next part of the journey is to Jericho. Jericho is a place where the walls of resistance had to come down for the people of Israel. Prophets realize that there are going to be struggles. Those walls of resistance are strong and tall and deceptive. It is going to be hard...they would want to give up. But they learned and we will learn that God never gives up and God stands beside God's people. Through this spiritual place, lessons of strength, trust, endurance, and faithfulness are learned.
  3. Go to Jordan – The third and last place traveled is the Jordan River. This is where the people of Israel crossed over to the Promised Land. Prophets must look to the river with vision and hope of crossing. This river we look to is about joy. We stand by the edge of the river and see what CAN BE. This is also the very river where Jesus was baptized. It is the place where he was declared beloved. This is a place, a sacred spot of joy where all of God's children are declared beloved.

You see, as Elisha travels with Elijah, he is shaped by this journey as we will be. We learn that God is powerfully present, calling out to us; we learn that there will be struggles and we must trust; and we will learn about God's abundant joy and what can be. At the Jordan Elijah, in his own way, handed on the baton so that the work of prophets may continue. Elisha asked Elijah for a double portion of his spirit as an oldest son would ask for a double portion of his inheritance from his father for Elijah was like a father to him. And it happened a bit like this. When Elijah was taken up to heaven right before Elisha's eyes, his mantle fell to the ground before him. A mantle was a heavy robe often worn for protection from the weather. BUT prophets, kings, and priests wore mantles to show their calling to do God's work. Elijah carried such a mantle. And when Elisha, in shock by what he had just seen, saw that mantle, he picked it up. He was ready to do the work of God.

We too are called to pick up the mantle. Pick up the mantle and become a congregation who is radically welcoming and advocates for justice and for the rights of all people.

Pick up the mantle and stand for nothing less than respect, love, and radical grace.

Pick up the mantle and ask the hard questions.

Pick up the mantle and put it on. Continue the journey, filled with the spirit. Get the traveling shoes on, whether they are tennis shoes, hiking boots or sandals and let's get on the road.

God is Speaking. Let God's voice be heard through us.