

**Walking with the Spirit** based on 2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14 and Galatians 5:1, 13-25

offered by Rev. Debbie Stockdale, June 30, 2019

This morning we heard two readings about the Holy Spirit helping individuals live God-centred lives. A God-centred life is a life that is both good for us individually and in turn, good for the world. In today's world, these are valuable lessons. When so many are isolated and lonely and using unhealthy behaviours to try and feel better, our world needs alternatives that are life-giving and that help us connect in healthy ways with each other.

In our first reading we hear of Elijah and Elisha. Elijah is a prophet who has been mentoring his student Elisha. A prophet is one who listens for God and tells others what he or she has heard. God's power flows through the prophet so that God is made visible in the world.

Elijah lived in the time when Israel was struggling to establish herself as a nation. It was also a time when the anointed kings were more concerned with getting what they wanted than following their God. Does that sound familiar to anyone? Are there any leaders in the world today for whom that is true? It was a tumultuous time and not a very safe time to be a prophet. The king and other leaders did not appreciate Elijah criticizing their choices.

Elisha has been following Elijah for some time and now, in this reading, we hear that Elijah has finished his ministry. Elisha is called to take over the mantle of leadership from Elijah and asks for a double portion of the same spirit that has guided Elijah.

In the second reading we hear the apostle Paul talking to the church in Galatia about what life in the Spirit looks like and, in contrast, what life without the Spirit looks like. There is some pretty plain talking that lays out what happens when you ignore the Spirit in your life. Let's have a little quiz. Anyone remember what Paul warns will happen if we ignore the Spirit?

fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing,

These are all things people use to fill the void left within when we don't invite God to fill the space in our souls. We are created to live in God. When we don't live that way we feel empty, anxious and alone. This, in turn, leads to behaviour that seeks to fill Spirit space with other not so healthy things.

What would the list of not so healthy things look like today if Paul were writing for us? What are things we use to try and fill the empty places in our souls today?

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We are not simply beings of flesh, we are beings of Spirit. The spirit space in us yearns to be filled. That yearning is powerful and hard to ignore. Feeding that yearning with unhealthy choices doesn't satisfy our souls and leads to more unhealthy choices until we are finally ready to make positive changes in our lives. The Spirit is there to nudge us in the right direction. When we follow that nudge, we discover freedom from our unhealthy cravings and the empty space is filled with love and generosity and gratitude.

Paul calls the good things that fill the hungry space within us the fruits of the spirit. Who remembers what the fruits of the spirit are? ....

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

These are the basis for living a God-centred life.

Cast your mind back now to our first story. Remember that Elisha, Elijah's student, asks for a double portion of the spirit - a double portion of the wisdom, the courage and the connection that Elijah has with God so that he can take on the mantle of leadership that has been Elijah's. He wants a double portion of the good stuff, the healthy stuff, the stuff that leads to good choices and that will help him be brave enough to speak truth to power.

In Elijah he saw everything he wanted to be. He realized that Elijah's strength and courage to lead with integrity and love came from his faith. Elijah relied on God to support him and inspire him to do the right thing. Elijah was full to the brim with the fruits of the Spirit which are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Elisha wants to be God's messenger too. He wants to be the voice of justice. He wants to heal the sick. He wants to teach others who want to learn how to live in the Spirit. When Elisha is doubly filled with the fruits of the spirit he can be confident that he is acting as God wishes. Elisha can fill the big shoes that Elijah leaves for him. He can walk in the Spirit as he leads with strength and courage.

Let's leap forward now to this place, this time. We are here in St. David's United Church. We are called to speak God's vision and message in our time and place. Just like Elisha, we are asked to take on leadership from those who went before us. Why? Just like in Elisha's time, there is a big gap between how we are living as a society and what God's hopes for the world and for each of us individually.

To live God-centred lives we must fill the empty space in our souls with the holy spirit. The spirit place within us gets filled one way or another, sort of like water filling a low spot to make a puddle. We want to be filled with good things that are life-giving rather than things that drain us and make us unhealthy. We know we are happier, more loving people when we fill that hunger within with the fruits of the Spirit which are ....  
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

We want to offer that same thing to our community, to all those around us struggling to fill that void with unhealthy things. We want to be a church family that models living spirit-filled lives, a church family that encourages healthy living for ourselves and helps others do that too.

How do we do that? How do we become full of the fruits of the Spirit and wear the mantle of leadership in God's name?

We make living in God a priority. We make space for God in our lives and we join together with our church family so that we can support each other and learn together. That is what being church community is all about. That is why we come. We come seeking the spirit. Our groups, like the ACTS study group, the prayer shawl group, the qigong group, are great examples of how some people in our church family stay connected with one another and the spirit. They spend time doing what they love to do. They take time to catch up on each other's lives in meaningful, deeper ways than the standard "I'm fine, how are you?" They celebrate each other's joys and support one another in the tougher times. They reflect on where God might be calling them to action in their lives.

In church family at its best, we step forward together and open our hearts to let the Spirit fill us. We refuse to be discouraged. When the road ahead looks bumpy and we can't see what is coming around the corner, we say, just like Elisha said when Elijah tried to discourage him from taking the same dangerous path that Elijah had: give me a double portion of the spirit so I can continue the good work you've been doing. Elisha had a vision. Elisha knew that he was called to take up the mantle of leadership from Elijah and persisted in following.

We, at St. David's are called to ask for a double portion of the Spirit too, so we can offer God-centred leadership in our world. We can be prophets who speak truth to power, who lead with the courage and compassion that Elijah did.

We are at a crossroads. Our expenses have exceeded our revenue for the last several years. Many areas of our church work need more volunteers to grow and thrive. We are unclear what direction is the right one for us to follow into the future. The uncertainty is uncomfortable and over the past few months, many people have asked me if I've heard anything about what the future of St. David's will be. They wonder if we will survive as a church? They talk about how important St.

David's is to them and are afraid they will lose their church. What do we do in the face of this fear?

Well, our scriptures for today are very helpful in answering this question. Elisha was afraid he didn't have the skills and courage to lead like Elijah did so he prayed. He asked for a double portion of the same spirit that Elijah relied on. Elisha realized that Elijah was not alone in his leadership. Elijah had God at his back, whispering in his ear and supporting him with strength and courage.

That is what we need too. We need to pray that we each have the strength, the courage, and the creativity needed to do our part in renewing St. David's ministry and mission in our world. It is not easy to change and do things differently. It is not easy to see what direction we should move in but it is possible with God's help. The Spirit is with us always so let's not forget that! Let's fill ourselves with the fruits of the spirit:

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control

When we centre our lives on these things, the Spirit grows in us and we feel stronger and braver. We have the courage to try new things and to make bold decisions to lead us in Spirit-filled directions. St. David's is not this building, it is not the staff, it is all of us! Each one of us is an integral piece of St. David's and each of us has a part to play. Let's nurture ourselves with the fruits of the spirit. In fact, let's pray for a double portion!

And when you are inspired with an idea or when you feel called to volunteer for something, let your voice be heard. We can move into the future with confidence if we rely on the Spirit. Let the fruits of the Spirit grow in you over the summer so that when we come together in the fall we have the energy and inspiration we need to move together into the future offering God's love to our world.