

**Notes on Rev. Nancy's Reflection ... as shared by Brenda Wallace  
Sunday" June 26, 2022  
"Keep your Face Forward!"**

### **Elijah Taken Up to Heaven**

**2** When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. **2** Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; the Lord has sent me to Bethel."

But Elisha said, "As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel.

**6** Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; the Lord has sent me to the Jordan."

And he replied, "As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So the two of them walked on.

**7** Fifty men from the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan. **8** Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground.

**9** When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?"

"Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied.

**10** "You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise, it will not."

**11** As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. **12** Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two.

**13** Elisha then picked up Elijah's cloak that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. **14** He took the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and struck the water with it. "Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" he asked. When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over.

Luke 9: 51-62

### **Samaritan Opposition**

**51** As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. **52** And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; **53** but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. **54** When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them[a]?” **55** But Jesus turned and rebuked them. **56** Then he and his disciples went to another village.

### **The Cost of Following Jesus**

**57** As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

**58** Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

**59** He said to another man, “Follow me.”

But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

**60** Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

**61** Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.”

**62** Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

Rev. Nancy opened her reflection this morning by recalling how her teacher called the class to attention — “Keep your face forward.” Today’s lectionary readings from 2 Kings and Luke 9 tell the stories of how Elijah and Elisha ‘faced forward’ and how Jesus ‘turned his face toward Jerusalem’ as his ministry drew him there. Jesus’ message was to face forward to what is important. “Keep your priority clear in mind,” said Rev. Nancy. The challenge she offered to us was to consider how our faith helps us face our future decisions.

Rev. Nancy found Jesus’ order to let the dead bury the dead to be harsh. “Sometimes we need time,” however, from Jesus’ point of view, every moment counted. He was ending his Galilean ministry and going to Jerusalem where his message faced great

danger. The Samaritans rejected Jesus and, in their dedication to their Master, James and John suggest that fire be called down upon them, remembering the story of Elijah and Elisha.

During their time, Israel was in a time of great transition. Elijah ended his ministry but his prophetic powers were passed down to Elisha. Rev. Nancy was reminded of the Old Testament story of Moses and Joshua with leadership moving forward.

Back to James and John, to better understand Jesus, Rev. Nancy saw an element of hopefulness as Jesus called his followers to a bigger picture. Jesus was marching to Jerusalem and his death. “His time was limited.”

Rev. Nancy went on to remind us that the theme for us is “discerning awareness of the work of discipleship — more important today!” She recalled a time when going to church was part of a community’s function — “We’d come and all would give.” It is harder now; we wonder, dream and discern to understand how Jesus calls us to be the future for our community. She asked, “How do we transform the church for the future?” The suggestion: Make discernment, facing forward to meet our challenges. It is not a quick answer. The 2 Kings scripture is hopeful — “The prophetic voice of God is carried on by Elisha like it is for all who carry on.”

Face forward like Elijah and Elisha, glimpsing the whirlwind of God (like the kites decorating our sanctuary.) “Are we, like Elisha, compelled to pick up the cloak, strike the waters and crossover. — See the whirlwind, live within, face forward.”

Jesus’ message sees our ready excuses... “another time when stars align then...” Stop making excuses, find what can change and see what happens. Each moment counts. Here Rev. Nancy reviewed the state of the world today and asked, “What if? Are we waiting for someone else to stand up... to advocate for us?”

Face forward. Don’t wait any longer. Jesus’ face was set upon Jerusalem and like him, we should hear the call. Don’t turn back. Do well to presume that every day counts. Our eyes and ears are open. No turning back.”

To conclude, Rev. Nancy offered a blessing by Jan Richardson. (A United Methodist Pastor, <https://paintedprayerbook.com/2013/06/25/blessing-of-elijah/>)

**Blessing of Elijah**

Make no mistake.  
This blessing that comes  
like hands laid  
upon your head,  
a mantle draped  
across your shoulders:

you do not bear it  
alone.  
  
Think of it  
as lineage,  
as litany:  
an ancient legacy  
entwining you among the strands  
that weave through

generations and centuries,  
that spiral with  
the enduring and  
determined grace  
of the story that has  
seized you,  
and the One  
who has claimed  
and called you.

Take heart  
that this blessing  
comes to you  
singed and  
scorched,  
signed by the blazing  
of wonders  
you can barely imagine  
and by trials  
that have already tested you,  
or you would not  
have found your way  
this far.

Lay it down,  
and it will be a path for you  
across terrain  
you never imagined  
daring to cross.

Take it up,  
and know the presence  
of those who have passed this  
on to you:  
who encompass you  
who enfold you  
who go with you  
and release you  
into the keeping  
of the road  
that is your own  
and the One  
who has called  
your name.