

## Full-Time Discipleship: Can't Text While Plowing

A sermon preached by the Rev. Canon Joanna C. Leiserson at Christ Church Cathedral, Cincinnati, Ohio, on Sunday, June 27, 2010.

*2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14; Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-62*

After a long and tumultuous—but productive—ministry, it's time to pass the mantle on. It takes a strong determination and not a little humility and trust to stop holding on to the mission that has been defined as “yours,” to give up the mantle, and to move on.

Elisha wants to be next in line. He has been handpicked by Elijah—actually, by God—and is following Elijah to the end. He is ready to pick up right where Elijah leaves off. But he is not that sure of himself— not sure he can follow in Elijah's footsteps. That's a wise self-reflection. He says to Elijah, “Let me inherit a double share of your spirit.” Personally, I think he only got one-half or two-thirds, but read the Elisha stories in 2 Kings and judge for yourself.

So the student prophet shadows the teacher. Elijah has completed his ministry and his time on earth and will be carried off in a fiery chariot pulled by horses of fire—one of the best Bible stories for children ever.

Now, Luke says, Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem. That's Luke-speak for “getting ready for the end”—for his death at the hands of the Roman Empire and then, after what would seem like forever or never, his rising to life again by God. He sets his face toward Jerusalem, determined to go to the city that kills its prophets, knowing that he will end his ministry there.

He meets his Elishas on the way—but unlike the original one, these don't ask for a greater spirit. In fact, there is an alarming shortage of commitment here. They don't say, “Please give me a double portion.” They say, “Let me take a little time off first.” One says, “Let me bury my father first.” *You're only 22 and your father isn't even sick yet, let alone dead.* “Let me start part time.” *And you, driving the plow and texting at the same time—you'll never get there that way!*

It's important to keep your eye on what you're really about. Remember the bumper sticker, *Honk if you love Jesus.* The next one was closer to the real point: *If you love Jesus, work for justice.* But now I see *If you love Jesus, honk. If you want to meet him, text while driving.* How will you get to the kingdom if you're always distracted?

On my journey here from Spokane nearly five years ago, the trip took me through Montana, Wyoming, South Dakota, Iowa, and I forget what states come next. America is so vast and so interesting, and all the states want you to stop and stay for a while, and maybe you'll like it so much, you'll end up living there. There's Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks, Devil's Tower, the Mississippi River. But I have to credit

South Dakota for trying the hardest to distract the traveler. Every mile, it seems, has a marker or billboard. Come to Mount Rushmore! Visit Wall Drug, the biggest drug store in the world and home of the jackalope! Visit the Corn Palace, made entirely of corn! The home of Laura Ingalls Wilder, the birthplace of Hubert Humphrey! Deadwood, hometown of Calamity Jane and Wyatt Earpp! Wow! Where was I going anyway?

This world is full of billboards that distract us from the kingdom. Elisha had fifty prophets who kept sneaking up behind him and whispering, “Give up. You’re going to lose him!” Every few miles, a moving billboard of prophets trying to talk him out of picking up that mantle. It takes a single-minded orientation, a determination to set your face toward God, in order to keep picking up the mantles that keep being handed to us.

C.S. Lewis once likened our earthly life to a rest stop, a road attraction on the way to the kingdom. On this stop, you get lots of chances for a preview of the final destination, and it’s tempting to take a detour. It’s easy to stay and stall, but we eventually need to move on. Even Christ Church Cathedral at this particular time, when we sit in the mountain and listen for God in the wind, or the earthquake, or the sound of sheer silence.

Even the church, a holy place and a house of prayer, is still rest stop toward the kingdom, a place to pray and receive spiritual comfort—but also a halfway house to the kingdom—a place to prepare for life with God, to care for the broken and send them off restored. It is our mission, when we look at this place, to set our face toward Jerusalem, toward the fulfillment of God’s kingdom. It will be easy to detour into distractions—settle old differences, fight old battles, visit irrelevant issues. But that’s like thinking that we’re about making the mantle part the waters than about getting onto heal the sick and the brokenhearted. So let’s remember who we are and what we are doing here. It is to be one Body united in Christ.

This is a rich place—and I mean in spirit. We are both parish *and* cathedral, *both* family ministry *and* mission oriented, *both* caring inward focus *and* caring outward. The vocation of this church is not just one or the other. It is to be one Body united in Christ. It is to be a giver of God’s abundance and a reflection of God’s reconciliation with his people. That is the mantle that we are to hold in this community.

Today is Dean Diamond’s last Sunday here. Let us remember and honor his ministry of inclusion, his commitment to a proudly diverse congregation, and his vision for the cathedral as a center for reconciliation in this community. As a half-way house, that’s not bad. As a mantle to take up, it’s a pretty hefty one. Let us pray for the spirit to wear it well, as we begin to move forward.