U.H.P.C. WORSHIP JUNE 30, 2019

SERMON TOPIC: “ON A JOURNEY”

It is important to have a “made up” mind about things that matter most in life, to make a decision to go all the way and to get to the point of no return. Starting with Jesus, we can find a number of people in the Bible, who went all the way and reaped their eternal and earthly rewards. We might consider Joseph, Daniel, Esther and Mordecai, David and Deborah. They followed the path set before them and accomplished their goal according to God’s purpose.

Most, if not all of us, have travelled on a journey from one place to another. Whether we are from New York, Africa, Caribbean, or some other place—even from home this morning to this place right now, we have all left one destination to arrive at another with some specific purpose in mind. Before we leave home, we make detailed preparations to ensure that we know where we are going, we have all the necessary finances, passports, dress, transportation, maps, medical examinations and immunizations ready. The journey may be geographical from one physical location to another. However, there are journeys that are not so. Some journeys are all about life and living through its stages, about spiritual initiation and destination, or about arrivals, departures, and rewards. I would like to ask us, if we have ever paused long enough to see on what kind of journey we are traveling, where we are going, and how we plan to get there safely and satisfactorily? Do we believe we have been on the right path with a specific goal in mind? Have we encountered detours along the way? Have we been experiencing well-meaning and concerned friends along the way interrupting our focus and vision? How do you handle them? Do you have a fixed plan to overcome distractions that might try to turn you around and cause you to stray off track?

As you might well imagine, Scripture has something to say and to teach about just about every subject we will encounter in life. I invite us to consider the journey of Elijah and Elisha which began at Gilgal and ended at the River Jordan. Some of us may recall a week or so ago that we heard of Elijah, the great prophet of God who had killed over four hundred of Jezebel’s prophets. This got her very upset and she threatened to make sure Elijah got the same thing done to him. Despite the strong faith of this powerful man of God, he became frightened, discouraged, and afraid. So, he decided he wanted God to take his life for he had had enough of the challenges of this earthly life. After much cajoling and encouragement from Jehovah God through divine angelic encounters, he would not relent. Eventually, God decided to grant him his wish. However, he would be taken away but not die a natural death. WHAT A MERCIFUL AND LOVING GOD WE SERVE!

This is where we pick up the story. The time had come for Elijah to be taken away, but first he would have to go on a particular journey to a specific place. He would take his attendant—Elisha with him. His destination was at the Jordan River where he and Elisha would need to cross over and separate one from another.

As they were on this journey from Gilgal to the Jordan, they were interrupted three times by certain prophets along the way. However, Elisha politely told them he already knew his master would be taken up that day so they should be quiet. Elisha had a goal in mind. He had been well trained, discipled, and anointed by Elijah to take up his prophetic mantle and continue his ministry just as powerfully and successfully as his master. They went from Gilgal to Bethel, to Jericho, and then finally to the Jordan. This was where Elijah paused and asked Elisha to name his request and wish before he, Elijah was taken away. Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah’s spiritual gift. THIS WAS BIG! Too often we limit God thinking we are being humble. BUT NOTHING IS TOO HARD FOR JEHOVAH GOD OUR CREATOR TO DO. Elijah acknowledged that Elisha was asking a very hard thing. However, if Elisha continued to remain focused, attentive, faithful, and loyal, enough to see him when he was being taken up, then he would receive his request. Elisha agreed. Elijah took off his mantle and flashed it over the River Jordan. It opened and they both crossed over. In a little while a whirlwind with chariots of fire and horses came down from heaven. Elijah was up lifted and taken away in an amazing spiritual display of God’s Glory and power. As he was being up lifted, he dropped off his mantle and Elisha picked it up.

The journey was successful. Elijah got his reward and his request to leave earth and to be with His Heavenly Father. Elisha got his reward for being a faithful, loyal, focused, disciple and servant of Elijah. He asked BIG and God granted his request. I INVITE YOU TO ASK BIG. WE SERVE A BIG AND BOUNDLESS GOD WHO DESIRES TO DISPLAY AND LAVISH HIS BLESSINGS ON HIS CHILDREN WHO STEP OUT IN FAITH.

In comparison to this model of discipleship, we see in the New Testament Gospel from Luke 9: 57-62, some “WOULD BE DISCIPLES” who thought they wanted to follow Jesus. It is surprising to note that they were all turned down by Jesus! WHY?... BECAUSE JESUS KNEW THEY DIDN’T HAVE THE INNER FORTITUDE NOR THE MENTAL, SPIRITUAL, EMOTIONAL, STRENGTH OR DISCIPLINE TO FOLLOW HIM WITH STEADFAST FAITH, LOYALTY, COURAGE, DETERMINATION, COMMITMENT, FOCUS, AND DEDICATION AS WE SEE IN THE CASE OF ELISHA TO HIS MASTER ELIJAH. One man asked to follow Jesus but was told “no” for foxes have holes, birds have nests, but the Son of Man had nowhere to lay His head. Another man Jesus called, but he said he needed to go back home and say goodbye to his family and loved ones. Yet another was willing but wanted to go back and bury his father. Jesus told them both no one putting his hand to the plow and pulling it back is worthy of the Kingdom of God. WHAT DOES THIS TELL US? I believe, Jesus is telling us through these examples that THIS JOURNEY TAKES CERTAIN TYPES OF PEOPLE TO CARRY OUT THE WORK AND TO SPREAD THE WORD OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD. Not everyone can manage what is required for this assignment. –It is better not to put your hand to the task at all than to put it there and then pull it back. –It is not a glorious job though some may think so. --It takes commitment, dedication, faithfulness, steadfastness, focus, attentiveness, and loyalty. --There is no place for comfort and looking back. –It is no place for the timid, the fearful, the cowardice, or the vacillating. Anyone who desires to have the rewards of the Kingdom of God, must be prepared to commit and to endure challenges and hardship along the route to the destination of that calling.

Like Elisha, such people must be Spirit filled and Spirit led as Paul outlines in Galatians 5. They must crucify the flesh with all its passions and be fully devoted to Christ. They must rid themselves of the passions of the flesh and be guided by the Holy Spirit. Elisha completed his training and received his desired reward. Elijah completed his journey and was up lifted in the glory of God in a whirlwind of chariots of fire and horses. Elisha took up the mantle and put his faith to work right away by flagging it just like Elijah did. The River Jordan opened, and he crossed over to the other side from whence he had come. There was no doubt in his mind that he had received his reward. He had no doubt that his faithfulness, loyalty, commitment, and dedication had paid off.

So, let me ask us: “Do we know where we are on our life’s journey?” How are we preparing for that transition? What rewards are we expecting for our obedience, service, loyalty, etc. to Christ? Will you allow others to throw you off course? OR will you/we remain steadfast until you/we reach the goal? Will we keep our focus on our God, upon the work of the Kingdom we are gifted to do, --resist the distractions and move forward to the place of your elevation, reward, and anointing for even a greater work? Let me encourage us to keep the faith. If the journey gets rough, worship and pray your way through for our God is faithful to reward the righteous. Your/ our day of elevation and reward is near. God is faithful to bless the journey of the faithful, the dedicated, the committed, who see it through to the end. May God release the mantle of the reward and elevation of those who have been obedient, willing, focused, sincere, and attentive to the work of the heavenly Kingdom.

Therefore, I pray in the matchless name of Christ Jesus lifting this as a prayer in faith and with thanksgiving for all those who have not turned back or allowed themselves to be turned around. May God bless them and us all with spiritual as well as material rewards in this world and in the next. For our God is a rewarder of the righteous. It is God’s plan to give us a future and a hope. It is God’s desire to prosper us and to keep us in good health. No good thing will be with-held from those who are faithful, who know their God, and who trust in Him. But like Elisha, Joseph, Daniel, David, Esther and many others, there will be a time of preparation, development, testing, faithfulness, focus, discipline, and loyalty. Then God will be pleased to release to us/them a double portion of blessings, gifts, and fruits in the natural as well as in the spiritual. I declare it done in the mighty and holy name of Yeshua-Ha-Messiach… Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Rev. Brenda R. Berry/ Pastor-Moderator

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AMEN.