

# “You Have Asked A Hard Thing”

2 Kings 2:1-12

The Transfiguration of our Lord is a major festival in the church year. The dazzling spectacle we hear about in Mark’s Gospel is a transcendent event as heaven and earth join together and Peter, James, and John witness the heavenly conversation of Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. But as I was preparing for today, I kept coming back to the Old Testament reading. I couldn’t get Elijah’s response to Elisha’s request out of my head.

Elijah gives a curious response to Elisha’s request. Why would having a double portion of Elijah’s spirit be a hard thing? Wouldn’t it be great to have twice the spirit of Elijah? Why was it going to be hard or difficult? It was not difficult because God couldn’t give it to him. It was not difficult for God. Nothing is impossible for God. No, the difficulty was going to be for Elisha.

Jesus says to His disciples in Luke chapter 12, “To those who have been given much, much more will be demanded.” It’s like the parable of the talents, to the man who the king gave 10 talents, it was expected that he would produce more than the one who was given 5 or 1. To those who have been given much, much more will be demanded.

That is a challenging reality. God does not judge a level playing field. This means that if you are blessed with gifts such as intelligence, strength, wealth, charisma, skills for making things, fixing things, managing a business or a household, or perhaps you have the time to listen to someone who is in need or someone who simply needs someone to listen, then God expects you to use

these gifts to His glory.

For example, if you are blessed with children, which are gifts from God, then God expects you to treat them as such and teach them to glorify His name. Having the gift of a child in your home means that living as if you have no children is no longer an option. Yet, our culture is littered with far too many parents who still want to live like they did when they were single.

In our Old Testament lesson, Elisha was asking for a very burdensome cross. He certainly did receive the double portion of Elijah's spirit, which is evidenced in the miracles he performed. But the potential of Elisha's prophetic ministry was now enormous. Elisha knew what God had done through Elijah, and how Elijah had suffered for his faith. Elijah had been chased into the wilderness by Queen Jezebel and the prophets of Baal who wanted to kill him. He had often gone without food. His was no life of luxury.

I believe that Elisha knew what he was asking for. Yes, he would be able to perform even greater miracles than Elijah, and would preach the saving Word to many, but the road would be doubly hard.

To those who have been given much, much more will be demanded. We all have gifts through which we can give glory to God who gave them to us in the first place. As the hymn writer says, "We give Thee but Thine own, what're the gift may be. All that we have is Thine alone, a trust O Lord, from Thee."

Whatever we have to offer – the wealth in which we all live in this society. I mean, there is not one of us who doesn't live like a king or queen by the world's standard. When you include all the people of the world, in regard to wealth and lifestyle, every one of us is in the top 1%. But it is not just wealth we have been given, maybe it is artistic talent, or as the hymn writer says, "if you cannot sing like angels, if you cannot preach like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus, you can say He died for all."

We all have the opportunity to share our faith in God. And like for Elisha, that is not always an easy road. Whether it is with your children or others around you, standing up, confessing your faith, inviting people to “Come and see,” (as we are focusing our attention on that theme throughout the year) being counted as a child of God is not always popular every place you go. There are times when we are all a little tempted to hide our faith. And that is a shame.

Elisha’s request was a hard thing because of the potential for ministry that he now had. What is your potential? What has God given you? How are you able to live up to the potential that you have? That is a difficult question and probably not one that should be asked. Satan loves to tear you apart and leave you always feeling guilty about not having done enough.

If you set “living up to your potential” as the standard by which you measure your life, and your life of faith, you will drive yourself insane with guilt. Satan will constantly whisper in your ear, “if only you would have done a little more, such and such bad thing wouldn’t have happened,” or “such and such a person would have not suffered as they did,” or “those things that you covet, which God, in His wisdom, has chosen not to give you – they could all be yours.”

Satan loves to make you think that God is not in control, or that He is not working for your ultimate good. He still rules over heaven and earth. What God has given you is everything you need – the forgiveness of sin, the Good News of salvation in Christ, the surety of the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. He has also given you a cross to bear and says, “Follow Me.”

Having been saved through no work of your own, we find ourselves with a wealth of unrealized potential and an opportunity to serve our Lord. However, as I said last week, our work in the Kingdom of God is like the work or “help” that your three year old child or grandchild gives you when cleaning or organizing the house. That three-year-old is a bundle of potential, but when you have them set

the table, it will not look like a 5-star restaurant. But you keep having them set the table.

Parents and grandparents take the opportunity to allow that three-year-old to grow through a series of micro-opportunities. God does the same with you. On the day that you were baptized, you were given everything you needed for salvation. From that day forward, God has given you micro-opportunities to learn more about Him and micro-opportunities to serve Him with the gifts He has given you and to take up your cross and follow Him.

And you will not serve Him to the fullness of your potential this day any more than I will tell you this day everything that there is to know about God. That sermon would last a lifetime. Just as serving the Lord to the fullness of your potential is simply a series of small events which lasts a lifetime.

That is the struggle we have as Christians. It is true that our lack of work is sinful. We repent of what we have done and what we have left undone. But just because we do not live up to our full potential each and every day, that does not belittle the work that God allows us to accomplish through those small, daily, continuous events – those micro-opportunities.

We are sinful people who fall short of God's demands, but our Father in heaven, being merciful and forgiving, takes away that guilt with all the rest of our iniquity, and cleanses us in the blood of His Son – washes us in the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

We all have gifts with which we can and are to serve our Lord. Our life, our faith, our children, our possessions, our mouth, our ears, and our hands, are all gifts with which we can serve God and His Church.

God has richly blessed us. We have been given much, and much will be demanded. Elijah was right that it is a hard thing. It is called a cross for a reason. But as St. Paul says, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Amen.