

Proper 8
Cycle C RCL

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14

In ancient Israel prophecy was a schooled discipline, *i. e.* prophets learned their craft from other prophets. The author of the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings) presents prophets as forming a guild or school. The present story is a *succession narrative*, an account of how a student (Elisha) succeeded his teacher (Elijah) as the head of such a prophetic school. (Note that the expression “your master” in 2:3 [Hebrew: *'adoneyxa*] is a way of referring to a teacher.) The narrative makes it clear that the prophet’s role is much more than merely delivering a verbal message. Elisha, like his teacher Elijah, will be empowered to perform the wonders that for our author are integral to the prophetic office. The fact that Elijah was taken into heaven, the abode of the divine beings (2:11), led in later Jewish thought to the idea that he would return from heaven at the end of the age.

Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20

Is this psalm the composite of a lament and a hymn as Gunkel held or is it something else entirely? In the first place we should pay attention to the references to mental acts on the part of the psalmist. Despite the BCP’s imaginative translations, three verses (3, 6, [both *'ezkerah*], and 12 [*ezkor*] of this psalm all begin with the expression “I shall remember.” The first two instances (verses 3, 6) act as a description of the psalm itself. The last (verse 12) refers to the memory of God’s mighty acts of old. Conversely, the psalmist inquires about *God’s* mental acts: has God (*El*) *forgotten* to be merciful and gracious (verse 9)? There is no statement of confidence that God will rescue the psalmist, and the anguish of the psalmist is that the right hand of the Most High (*Elyon*) has somehow “changed” (verse 10). The function of the hymnic section (13-20) is to contrast God’s former acts of power by which the nations knew that there was a God with the present period of doubt. The hymnic section may indeed be older than the rest of the psalm (Gerstenberger), but it is well crafted into the psalm. The references to mental acts have suggested to some that the whole of Psalm 77 is a meditation or prayer dealing with the apparent powerlessness of God (Terrien).

or

1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21

Following a period of self-imposed exile in Sinai to escape King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, the prophet Elijah returned to Israel to preside over the end of Ahab’s rule and its institutionalized worship of Baal. The anointing of the rebel Jehu (19:16), coupled with the anointing of King Hazael in neighboring Syria, guarantees that Ahab’s rule will not survive and that he will not be able to establish a government in exile in Syria. It is interesting that the Deuteronomistic Historian equates the anointing of these kings with the selection of Elijah’s successor in prophecy, Elisha. Elisha’s reluctance to leave his home without bidding his parents farewell (19:20) may be the reason why Elijah does not actually anoint him as commanded. This story of Elisha’s reluctance probably underlies the story of the one who protested that he had to bury his father before following Jesus in today’s Gospel. (See below on Luke 9:51-62.)

Psalm 16

This psalm has much in common with the laments, but in fact it does not ask for deliverance so

much as it expresses trust that God will protect the psalmist. As such, it is usually classified with the *psalms of trust* like Psalm 23. The setting of such psalms within the context of temple worship is not clear.

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Those who believe that the real problem in Galatia was a libertine form of Gnosticism point to this passage as proof of their case, contending, perhaps rightly, that converts to Judaism would not require additional warnings against the common vices listed in verses 19-21 but that Gnostics who believed they were not bound by Jewish Law would require some notice that they were not free to engage in immoral behavior. For Paul freedom from the Law meant freedom to engage in the virtues listed in verses 22-23 as behavior appropriate to the new age.

Luke 9:51-62

For Jesus to be “taken up” in Luke’s Gospel refers to his Ascension which receives special note in Luke and Acts. Being a student of Jesus is not like being the student of one of the itinerant rabbis of Jesus’ day but is like the dangerous discipleship into which the prophet Elijah invited Elisha. (See above of 1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21.)

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