

First Presbyterian Church
“Close Encounters of the Jesus Kind: Moses and Elijah”
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2 Kings 2:9-14; Luke 9:28-36

He dropped it. He dropped the baton, and the race was as good as over.

Those who love track-and-field events will remember the US men’s Olympic relay team failed to advance in the 4 x100 relay at the Tokyo Games in 2020. This was despite being considered the best track relay team in the world. A relay involves teamwork and careful coordination. What went wrong? Could their passing system be wrong? Was it a lack of leadership? No, it was the simplest thing...two runners failed to connect and pass the baton. The team ended up in sixth place and that left them out of the final. The failure of the team was that they dropped the baton.

Elijah passing the baton to Elisha

Passing the baton is nothing new. Our first testament lesson is about Elijah and Elisha and it tells us about the power of passing the baton. Elijah knew his ministry was coming to an end and it was time to hand the baton to the next person. God knew the baton needed to be passed on as well so he chose Elisha to receive it. Passing the baton began with Elijah anointing Elisha. Passing the baton continued when Elijah took Elisha under his wing as his student and taught him what it takes to be a good prophet. Elisha was keen and attentive. He would not leave Elijah’s side because he wanted to learn everything. Elisha was determined to follow in his master’s footsteps. He was persistent. “Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you,” Elisha said. “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit. You have asked a hard thing.” This is because it was not a job for the fainthearted. The prophets said exactly what God told them to say - no sugar coating, tell it as it is. It was a tough life. Elijah’s answer was assuring, “If you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not.” And so, Elisha was there when Elijah was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot. In that moment the baton was passed.

From Elijah and Moses to Jesus

Though it may seem strange, the baton even had to be passed on to Jesus. This is the idea at the heart of our New Testament lesson. When Jesus went up the mountain to pray and he took Peter, John, and James with him, it was not simply to experience God’s glory. It was to have the disciples see the passing of the baton. The disciples saw Moses, the law giver, and Elijah, one of the greatest prophets, appear and talk to Jesus. The disciples then heard the voice of God specifically saying this is my son, the chosen one. Listen to him. Jesus has the baton! The disciples witnessed the baton being passed to Jesus. It was an affirmation he was now the right one, the son of God. It was a reminder that the Law and Prophets had been fulfilled. Then it was time for the disciples to leave the glory of that moment behind and follow Jesus more closely, so that when he was ready to pass the baton, they would be ready to take it.

Jesus to his disciples/disciples to us

The baton was passed from Moses, the law giver, to Elijah, the greatest of prophets, to Jesus. Jesus passed the baton to his disciples some 2000 years ago. And now we have received the baton; we are in the race. And every week when we come here, we learn how to run the race. We learn that as his disciples we must be attentive to his word through his teachings. We must be doers of His word. We need to allow God's values to direct our words, deeds, and lives. We should see everything we do in the light of Christ. At Everybody's Church, running the race is being done in a big way. You take care of others because you have taken care of each other first. There is Bible study, Sunday school, mission locally and internationally, Deacon ministry, Stephen Ministry, praying for the concerns of the church family and community and more. And as we follow the instructions, we remember that God will protect, provide, and strengthen us. Though running the race is not easy, we practice it. But what about passing the baton?

In Kenya when Christians would meet, the standard greeting consisted of saying Bwana asifewe in Kiswahili. Translated this means Praise the Lord. And they would take the time to praise God and witness of God's goodness, sharing with each other what God has done for them.

We may not do that here in the United States and it is not easy for many of us to share our faith. There are several ways one can pass the baton, something as simple as talking about an answered prayer. Promising to pray for someone. Giving words of encouragement. Lending a listening ear. Being gracious and loving. By being courteous and thoughtful. People will be attracted to you and will want to be like you.

Challenge: Since we now have the baton, maybe we need to ask ourselves how we are passing the baton in our own lives.

Do me a favor! Please don't drop the baton!!!

Prayer

Our Lord and our God, give us the courage to tell others about your goodness. Help us to keep running the race and passing the baton without dropping it. In Jesus' name. Amen.