

I AM THEY

Sermon Series: “Five Strategic Sermons for Today”

April 22, 2018 –2 Kings 2: 6-16

The Church of the Covenant

There is a generational transfer of leadership going on at The Church of the Covenant. To use the metaphor from our scripture lesson of Elijah the prophet transferring the mantle of prophetic authority to the upcoming, younger prophet Elisha –Our Elishas are requesting the mantel and our Elijahs are passing the mantle of authority and leadership. The mantle is passing. And this is all good. This is the only way our church can blossom and have a future.

The sermon title, “I Am They” comes from something I realized many years ago when I was a young Presbyterian minister. That will tell you how long ago it was! And I would go to denominational meetings, or attend committee meetings and I would say to myself –“Why don’t THEY do it this way? Why don’t THEY do it that way? THEY need to change. THEY need to do things differently. THEY need to do it my way and then THEY would do better.” And this little mental litany was – “Why don’t THEY do it this way?” One day I had one of those monumental eureka moments. At what point am I going to step forward and assume leadership? At what point am I going to stop bellyaching and start leading? And I remember the moment. I said to myself, “THEY aren’t THEY. I AM THEY!!!!” Stop complaining and start assuming leadership...Its easy to complain; its much harder to lead. The world has way too many complainers and far too few leaders. Do you want to waste your energy complaining or do you want to channel your energy positively by leading? Which one are you?

Our Holy Cow Congregational Survey that was completed last fall was VERY interesting. It noted among other things that the highest priority identified was for young families and youth and young people to come and to be assimilated into the life of the congregation. Every age demographic identified this as the top priority. 65 and up –more younger people, included and assimilated. Age 40 to 65 –more young people and them included and assimilated. Under age 40 –we want more younger people and them included and assimilated. 8:30 service people and 9:43 service people and 11am service people all in staunch agreement. Let's have more young people, more young families, and let's make sure they are assimilated and included into our church. It was striking the great unanimity on this issue across the board. As a subset of all of that was the powerful insight that fully one third of our congregation would like to become involved in some way but didn't know how. Get Involved Sunday, what we are doing today, is a strategic response by the Session to the wishes of our congregation. Here are LOTS of ways to become involved; here are lots of ways for young families and younger people to connect. Stop waiting for THEY to do something and step forward, deepen your discipleship, pick up the mantle, and assume your God-called right to lead. That's what today is about. Step up to the plate. Deepen your walk. Step forward in leadership. Be the disciple you know in your heart you have been called by God to be. Say to yourself –I AM THEY.

The story of Elijah and Elisha is one of my favorites in the Old Testament. Elijah is one of the greatest prophets ever. Elisha is to be his successor. Elisha has been trained and mentored by Elijah. They know the time has come for Elijah to be taken up into the heavens by the chariot of fire. Elijah takes off his mantle and does a miracle of

parting a stream for them to walk through. This mantle of authority comes from the Lord. It allows churches to do great things for the Kingdom, beyond what anyone would conceive as possible. In that way this spiritual authority is miraculous. And then Elijah asks Elisha what he wants. And Elisha asks: *“I pray you, let me inherit a double share of your spirit.”* (2 Kings 2: 9) Elisha says, I want what you have Elijah, but I want a double portion of it. So Elijah takes off his mantle of spiritual authority and places it on the shoulders of the young prophet Elisha. And the generational transfer of leadership occurs. The passing of the mantle. From one person to another. From one generation to another. Here’s the sequence. Those in leadership first ask those who are to come –What do you want? Those who are rising in leadership must then ask to lead. Elisha says, “Give me a double share of your spiritual leadership”. There must be asking and there must be stepping up and rising to the occasion or there will be no passing of the mantle of authority. And then and only then, the one generation must take off the mantle of leadership and place it upon the next generation’s shoulders. The mantle is passed. The transfer occurs. And a new generation of leadership assumes the mantle with a double share of the spirit.

That’s what’s happening today. Younger generation, you must ask for a double share. Generation already in leadership, and when they do you must take off the mantle from your own shoulders and pass it on to the next generation. My favorite part of all those tables out in the Commons Area today is the table where you can come and make a suggestion for something new for the church to do. Of course, we will listen to you when you actually then say, I will do it. Not just, “THEY should do it.” **I am they.**

This is some coaching for those presently in leadership. When a younger newer generation asks, it is not for them just to come and sit on committees and do everything the same way you, as long time leaders, always did everything. No, they will do it differently; sometimes better, but always differently. You cannot expect Elisha to be Elijah. The mantle is the same, but the people and what is on their heart to do and how to do it, will be different. I like to illustrate this with a toilet paper roll. Most people have a preference how the paper is to hang down from the holder. (I wish I could come up with a more high-falutin illustration). I like it when it hangs over the top; that's the way it should be. But there are other people who like it the opposite, that is hangs UNDER the holder. In a way when I go into a church bathroom and find it done differently than I like it I discover myself growing irritated and wanting to change all the toilet paper rolls in the church. But then I think to myself, yeah, and if I always have to have it my way then I would have the permanent assignment to change all the toilet paper rolls every day and for the rest of my life, until there is no one left to do it my way. Or, I can allow that perhaps a new group and a new generation of people might like to do it differently than I do.

Elisha, do you want a double share of the Spirit of the Living God? Then step forward, ask today. Elijah, and when they ask, and they are, be certain to take the mantle off your own shoulders and place it on theirs. Amen and Amen.

By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA

IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!