

Circle of Life

On Sunday, we explored an epic Old Testament story where Elijah transitioned to heaven and Elisha picked up his mantle and carried forward.

1. On Sunday Jeff told about his first childhood memory of death when his Grandpa died. What's your first memory of death – and how did it affect you?
2. Death can be a scary subject. Not easy to talk about. But let's share as openly as we feel comfortable. How often do you think about death? What is your greatest fear about death?
3. Today's Bible story invites us to reimagine death through the lens of faith. Read II Kings 2:1-13.
 - a. In verse 3, the prophets tell Elisha, "Today the Lord will take your master away from you." It's a reminder of our mortality. James 4:14 puts it this way, "What is your life? You are like a puff of smoke that is visible for a little while then disappears." What point is that verse trying to make? Is it trying to discourage us? If not, what's the point?
 - b. Everything on earth lives, then dies. Great companies come and go (TWA), great churches come and go (Crystal Cathedral), great fashion statements come and go (bellbottoms and clogs). Can you think of any earthly thing that never dies? Is the temporary nature of everything on earth a good or bad thing?
4. In our Bible story, everybody seems to be tiptoeing around Elijah, not wanting to tell him he will soon die. When the prophets tell Elisha his master will die, he says, "I know, keep silent." But later in the story, it turns out Elijah knew all along (vs. 9) and seemed amazingly at peace about it. For him it was just the natural next step in a life of faith.
 - a. Jeff shared the story of a time a few years ago when he thought he might be near the end. Have you ever thought you might be near the end? What was that experience like for you?
 - b. Have you ever seen someone move through the dying process with great peace? How did they do it? What anchored them?
 - c. Someone once said that death is the last and greatest step on our path of discipleship, in that it represents the ultimate act of surrender, as if we're saying to God, "I trust you so much, I willingly surrender my life back to you." Or as Jesus said on the cross, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Luke 23:46. Do you buy the notion that dying is the last and greatest step in our discipleship process? Why or why not? Is there anything we can do on a practical level to better prepare ourselves for that day?

5. Take another look at the description of Elijah's transition from this life to the next. Re-read II Kings 2:11-12.
 - a. Describe what you think that scene looked like. What did Elisha witness?
 - b. What do you think Elijah was feeling or experiencing as all this took place?
 - c. In near death experiences, people often describe their spirit leaving their body and floating above it all, as their body moves through the stress of death. What do you make of that? Do you think that's what it will be like?

6. Before his transition, Elijah says to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you before I am taken from you." Elisha says, "Please let me inherit a double portion of your spirit." That took a lot of hutzpah. Elijah was widely regarded as Israel's greatest prophet, and now Elisha was asking for a double portion of his spirit.
 - a. What do you think motivated Elisha's request?
 - b. Elijah was a spiritual mentor to Elisha. Elisha wanted to be able to live in the spirit of his mentor – times two! Who is it that you feel that way about? What was it that made (or makes) them so powerful or beautiful? Have you consciously asked God to give you a double portion of their spirit?
 - c. Elisha picked up the fallen mantle of Elijah and, as we'll see in weeks ahead, went on to do amazing things. Jeff said, "Like Elisha, there are great and wonderful things God has put you here to do. Don't confuse 'great and wonderful' with 'famous.' Some of the most incredible spiritual feats happen so quietly that almost no one notices. There are great and wonderful things that need to be done that only you can do. The mantle now falls to you." As you look back over your life so far, tell us about a time when God used you to do something that feels really important in the eyes of God? (Let's share these thoughts not out of a spirit of pride, but out of spirit of celebration for the opportunities God gives us.)
 - d. Do you see yourself as a prophet? Should we?
 - e. In Lion King, Simba has trouble believing he is destined to a life of significance. Rafiki has to remind him that the spirit of his father lives in him: "Look closer, he lives in you." It's the same way with us and the Spirit of Christ. Jesus said, "The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these." John 14:12. Do you believe it's possible for us to live with a "double portion" of the Spirit of Christ? If so, what does that mean? And how do we do it?

Our time on earth is brief. Let's make the most of it!