

II Kings 2:1-12a  
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### Parent-Child-Church Dedication of Claire Ann Gaffney

#### “I Want to Be Like You”

One of my favorite Disney full-length motion pictures is *The Jungle Book*. Loosely based upon Rudyard Kipling’s book, the animated *Jungle Book* is filled with great lines and super songs. One such song is “I Want to Be Like You,” sung by King Louie, the orangutang who wants to be like the humans. You remember the story: the boy Mowgli is raised by wolves and then Bageheera the Panther and Baloo the bear become parental figures. After Mowgli is kidnaped by monkeys, he is taken to King Louie, who wants to know the secret of man’s red fire. He sings, “Now don’t try to kid me man-cub; I made a deal with you. What I desire is man’s red fire so I can be like you. Now give me the secret mancub, come on, clue me what to do, give me the power of man’s red fire so I can be like you.” And the chorus goes, “Ooo, Ooo, Ooo. I want to be like you; I want to walk like you, talk like you. You see it’s true, an ape like me, can learn to be human too.”

Many of *us* find *ourselves* singing, “I Want to Be Like You.” The fashion industry leans heavily on this rationale. Trends in automotive selection, status seekers, and even peer pressure can point to this quest to be like someone else.

While that is the *negative* side of the phrase, “I want to be like you,” the expression also has some *positive* connotations. Lisa and Dave, your children are always looking at you with this quest. Consciously or unconsciously, children look to adults as their models for behavior and conduct. Worthy role models validate the song when sung by children, “I want to be like you.”

In our Old Testament passage, we find that Elijah asked Elisha, his potential successor, what he could do for him. Elisha said, “Give me a double portion/share of your spirit.” Why did Elisha want to be like Elijah? Let’s take a look back at Elijah’s life.

Elijah was the greatest prophet of the northern kingdom from the ninth century B.C. and was from Gilead. He was direct, rough, abrupt, and perhaps the most passionate character that Israel produced. He performed miracles, struggled against Baalism, and filled a prophetic role.

Whenever you read the story of Elijah, you are reading the story of a man with extraordinary courage. Again and again, as he walks across the pages of the Old Testament, he is depicted as a man having the courage to face what was before him. When others traveled only in clan groupings because of wild animals, bandits, and other enemies, he went out *alone* into the wilderness. When others were too cowardly to speak out against the intimidating policies of one of the most powerful rulers of the Northern Kingdom of Israel -- a king named Ahab -- it was Elijah who dared to rock the boat and oppose the king. When Queen Jezebel was leading Israel to flirt with the materialistic god, Baal, it was Elijah who called for a theological showdown on Mount Carmel to determine which was the *real* God of Israel -- the God of Hebrews called Yahweh or the materialistic god called Baal. Nothing happened when the prophets of Baal requested a sign from their god. But the God of the Hebrews rained fire from heaven onto the sacrifice being offered by Elijah. He was courageous.

Near the end of his ministry, as he was resting in a cave while running away from Queen Jezebel, after he had the prophets of Baal killed, God appeared to him. Among the things that God said to Elijah were some instructions. God told Elijah to go back the way he came and go to the Desert of Damascus, and while there to anoint Elisha, to succeed him as prophet. Elijah did this by throwing his cloak over Elisha's shoulders (I Kings 19:19), denoting God's intention to bestow the prophetic powers upon him as the successor to the great Elijah.

Our text focuses on the last days of Elijah's time on earth and Elijah's development and preparation of Elisha to receive the mantle, the symbolic transferring of leadership. He engaged the young prophet in three experiences to test him and prepare him for the forthcoming responsibilities.

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We first see the travel itinerary of Elijah and Elisha. Perhaps Elijah was giving Elisha a short historic tour of Israel before departing this world. They began their journey in Gilgal, where the Hebrews first made camp after crossing the Jordan River, and made their way to Bethel, which was a sacred temple site. From there they returned to Jericho (the Hebrews' first triumph west of the Jordan) and then made their way to the Jordan River (reminiscent of the miraculous crossing). Finally, Elijah parted the water with his mantle, and the two crossed over.

Elisha faithfully stayed with Elijah throughout this journey, even though Elijah offered him opportunities to stay behind. This was the second test that Elijah presented to Elisha, and he faithfully and steadfastly proved that he was a true follower. The third test resided in the "sons of prophets" who, in every location, warned Elisha that Elijah's departure was imminent. No one knew exactly where it would occur or the exact circumstances, but Elisha was steadfast. He would not be discouraged from loyally remaining with Elijah.

By staying with Elijah, Elisha was communicating his loyalty, but was also *learning* from the person he would follow. Staying with him, being faithful even when others declared that Elijah was leaving, was significant to Elisha. He wanted to *be* like Elijah, to *learn* from him and to be *prepared* for when his time of leadership presented itself.

We rarely know when we will be called upon to lead. Sure, there are positions or offices that *require* leadership, but I am talking about day-to-day circumstances. Lisa and Dave, as parents we know that we are *leaders* of our children, but some occasions become teachable moments when we can *teach* a valuable lesson. Daily conversations with people present opportunities to help another out of a jam, to provide a lifeline to someone who is discouraged, or to set a positive example. Whether we are playing basketball, getting groceries, or going about our routine, we often will find opportunities to be a positive example.

Elisha was very clever. He had studied his predecessor. He knew the hazards of being a prophet. He knew what would be required. He knew that prophecy often meant standing alone, without the benefit of standing armies that march by day and night. It would mean living as a force of one for God. Elisha wanted to stay around Elijah as long as he could. He needed more time with his mentor so his spirit could rub off on him. He did not want Elijah to make the ascension until he had received the full dosage of strength needed for the fight. He needed confidence. He needed strength. He needed the added time that only a true mentor could give.

So when Elijah asked, "What can I do for you before I leave this world?", why did Elisha want to receive a double portion/share of his spirit? The Old Testament word *spirit* reveals that vital energy is a common connotation. The spirit equipped successive generations with power, wisdom, courage, strength, and talent. Thus, Elisha sought the energizing power which characterized the ministry of Elijah, and one purpose of the numerous miracle stories associated with Elijah is the confirmation of that transfer of power.

Receiving a double portion/share of Elijah's spirit was not the request of a disciple who hoped to outstrip his master. It was an appeal to the Jewish law that gave the eldest son a double portion of his father's goods. Elisha was requesting that he be acknowledged as Elijah's *heir* -- inheriting the power and influence of the prophetic office. And, when Elijah was taken up into the whirlwind, he left behind his mantle or his influence for Elisha.

While the idea of Elijah leaving behind his mantle or influence for Elisha is symbolic, it is a fact of life that everyone of us does leave some type of influence behind us. You and I have an influence on other people. We can no more keep from exerting an influence with our lives than we can keep from casting a shadow on a sunny day. You cannot throw a stone into a pond without causing ripples that spread out in widening circles until they touch the distant shore. And you cannot live in this world without causing ripples of influence that widen out and touch the lives of

others. Dave and Lisa, this is even more true about the influence that parents have on their children.

A minister was in New Orleans for a conference and found that taking the bus from his leased condo was the best transportation option. One morning a woman got on the bus and rode for a little while. As the bus went by a certain street, the woman yelled at the bus driver, "Hey, you didn't turn on that street!"

"No, ma'am," the driver said. "This bus doesn't turn until we get to Canal Street."

The woman was obviously irritated and she let loose with a string of unrepeatable words. She demanded that the bus driver stop and let her off. Everyone on the bus seemed to be embarrassed by this woman and her profanity. Everyone was very quiet.

As the woman stepped off the bus onto the sidewalk, the bus driver said, "Madam, you left something behind."

She turned and asked, "What is it?"

The bus driver smiled and said, "Madam, you left behind a very bad impression." Then, he closed the door and drove away.

As we go through life, we are always leaving behind an impression. As we go through life, we are always having an influence which touches others. As we go through life, we are always having an effect upon others. It is a fact of life that we can't live without touching others with our lives. Our lives can heal or hurt. Our lives can encourage or discourage. Our lives can be a positive influence or a negative influence. We cannot escape the fact that our lives will have an influence upon others. The only choice we have is the *kind* of influence or impression we leave behind.

During the Revolutionary War, George Washington had an abundance of soldiers volunteer to fight during the summer months, but as winter came, with rations in short supply and blankets being scarce, they began to slip silently from camp and return to the warmth of their families. After some weeks of this, General Washington despaired of "summer soldiers," saying that he could not win a war with them. The kingdom of God has had its problems with summer soldiers.

A few years ago, Jennifer designate our theme for Youth Sunday to be the Margaret Mead quote, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful and committed citizens can change the world," which is actually the first part of the quote. Ms. Mead concluded the thought with these words, "Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit because Elijah was worthy of respect. A small group of committed followers of God held firm to the faith under the leadership of Elisha. A small band of committed disciples solidified their faith to Christ after his resurrection, and they changed the world. Every day, we are given that opportunity to change *our* worlds for good.

So the invitation today is for everyone and is presented as questions: Are there people who are looking to us for leadership? Are there folks who look at us and say "I want to be like *you*?" Would you be surprised if someone followed you around, like Elisha did with Elijah, to learn from *you*? What kind of influence are you leaving behind? In reference to the Kingdom of God, could you be considered a "summer soldier," participating with convenient commitment? If you made the offer that Elijah made to Elisha, if you knew that you were leaving this world, and you asked the question, "What can I do for you before I leave?", would the person ask for a double portion of *your* spirit? Are we worthy of that kind of respect? If not, then why not? If not now, then when?

My hope and prayer is that others will be able to say of you and of me, "I want to be like *you*."