

WD June 10, 2024

## “Passing the Baton”

We know the phrase ‘passing the Baton.’ It likely, comes from relay races in track where a baton is passed from runner to another—one baton carried by four runners. In our case the baton of Senior pastor will soon pass from Pastor Kischnick to the next guy—presumably myself. The baton in this case is the ministry of the Word and Sacrament here at Grace. Many other pastors before us have carried this baton since 1927. One day it will pass again from me to another and Lord willing to many after that. It’s the Lord’s Church and it is for Him to determine the best course for His people.

In about a year Pastor Kischnick, our Senior pastor of 34 years will retire. He admits that he is a lot more senior than he used to be and is ready to step out. So, about one year from now he will retire. I thought on this one-year mark we might consider a few things. The main thought for this day is that I can’t help but think of the baton being handed off from Elijah to Elisha. I would suggest that you open your Bible to 2 Kings 2. I’ll be bouncing around in that chapter today.

First, notice that the time had come for Elijah to go up to the Lord and twice Elisha is reminded about it in vs 3 and 5. “And the sons of the prophets who were in Bethel (and later in Jericho in verse 5) came out to Elisha and said to him, “Do you know that today the Lord will take away your master from over you?” And he said, “Yes, I know it; keep quiet.” Translation, “Yes I know, you don’t have to remind me.” Like Elisha, one is never ready to see a friend or a mentor go, especially one as faithful as Elijah.

Notice how Elisha handles the news. The Lord sends Elijah to Bethel but Elisha goes with him even though Elijah told him to stay behind. Then the Lord sends Elijah to Jericho and Elisha sticks with him again. Finally, as Elijah crosses the Jordan Elisha stubbornly stays right with Elijah while all the other prophets remain on the others side. Since Elisha refused to leave Elijah’s side the Lord sent a chariot of fire to separate the two prophets. Once finally separated the Lord sent a whirlwind (a tornado) to scoop up Elijah to the Lord. Elisha reacts by tearing all his clothes as he mourns the absence of Elijah.

Well, I don’t expect any whirlwinds for PK nor do I expect to start tearing my shirt in mourning. I wouldn’t mind a double portion of the Holy Spirit though. Who of us couldn’t benefit from having more of the Holy Spirit. But I, like many of you, will miss having PK as pastor at Grace. We have become friends over the years and have enjoyed serving the Lord as a team. For many at Grace here in New Albany, he’s been the only senior pastor they have known. Of course, he will be around, but it will be different.

Moving forward. In the rest of chapter 2 Elisha settles in as a chief prophet. At first his fellow prophets talked Elisha into allowing them to send a search party for Elijah’s body—thinking the tornado dropped him somewhere. Perhaps this request was a form of mourning by the other prophets. Notice how affected the others were here. Elisha knew it was an unnecessary task but patiently allowed them to search. Perhaps the activity would allow them some closer and help them move forward.

We at Grace will often look back to the last 34 years with PK even as we know we must move forward. Sometimes that might mean we don’t want anything to change. The next pastor may even feel unsettling. The lesson from Elisha here is patience. The baton remains. It’s still the Lord’s church. I might be different from PK. The next pastor will be different from both of us. I think we can breathe easy on this. The Lord has blessed Grace with many faithful pastors for the last hundred years. God can bless us with the next one too.

Finally, we see Elisha act as the Senior prophet for the first time in vs 19-22. 19 Now the men of the city said to Elisha, “Behold, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees, but the water is bad, and the land is unfruitful.” 20 He said, “Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it.” So they brought it to him. 21 Then he went to the spring of water and threw salt in it and said, “Thus says the Lord, I have healed this water; from now on neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it.” 22 So the water has been healed to this day, according to the word that Elisha spoke.”

This bowl of salt is the baton. The healing water of the Word spoken by the new prophet. We know how saline purifies water. That’s the point of the salt in the water—it is purified. Note, however, that it was placed in a new bowl. The new bowl is very symbolic of the new Senior prophet. The Lord purifies the land, “according the Word that Elisha spoke.” I would expect the same results here at Grace. A new bowl but the same water just like many runners with the same baton. If the baton doesn’t cross the finish line no one wins.

However, if the baton remains the race is won. Likewise, if the Word is in Grace Lutheran we will run well and win our race. The goal of a good pastor is to keep that Word front and center—to be the UPS driver for God’s stuff and not the center of attention. That place belongs only to Jesus.

I too wonder what God will bring next year with a new pastor and a new music director too for that matter. I wonder whom I will be working with as much as anyone. But remember, at one time Pastor Kischnick was new and so was Helen, and so was I.

Will everything go perfectly in the future. We know that answer. I hope it goes better than Elisha’s initial trip back home. At the end of chapter 2, Elisha, on his way from Jericho to Bethel, is being harassed and teased by a bunch of kids. He must have walked through the playground of a school for so many kids to be harassing him. “Go up, You Bald head!” Maybe Elisha was sensitive to his loss of hair—not sure. Apparently, this pushed Elisah too far though. When he had had enough, he turned around and cursed the little runts. How did the curse play out? Right after the pronouncement two female bears came from the woods and tore-forty-two boys. Try that one at Confirmation class! Yikes.

Hopefully, we at Grace won’t have to wrestle any bears but we may have some problem solving that feels unbearable. (See what I did there.) No point worrying. Worrying isn’t problem solving. Instead, we will work our way through future challenges as we have done already many times at Grace. We didn’t get to a hundred years as a congregation by how much hair or lack of hair the pastor has but only by the grace of God.

As we enter the final year of Pastor Kischnick’s tenure as a Senior Pastor at Grace we certainly want to savor the time we have left. We also want to pray and prepare ourselves for what is next. The new pastor will be different and new to us, but we certainly look forward to seeing what the Lord may accomplish next at Grace because of it. In the meantime, we will keep carrying our baton and run our race that the Lord has marked out for us. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Pastor Matt Woods  
John 3:30