

“Always Moving”
II Kings 2:1-14, Galatians 5:1, 13-25
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When we start moving in kindness and faith, God reveals his will for us.

Do you remember learning how to ride a bike? That was a big deal in my neighborhood growing up, because like a lot of neighborhoods during the baby boom generation, there were tons of kids around us. There were four kids in our house next door to us were four brothers, the two houses across the street each had three and the house on the corner had six. All summer long we spent outside either playing ball in the vacant lot or fishing at the local pond or building a fort on the hill behind our houses. But everything was done on bikes. Every kid had a bike, usually a stingray with the banana seat and the raised handlebars and a sissy bar in the back. If you didn't know how to ride a bike, you were left behind. I remember that it took me a while to learn to ride a bike. I'm sure I must have been five or six, but I remember that this didn't make a whole lot of sense to me. How could one balance on two wheels? You'd fall over, either to one side or the other. Everytime I went out and sat on my bike I couldn't make it balance. My dad tried to tell me that a bike is much easier to balance when it's moving, that only when it's stopped did you have to put your foot down to make sure you didn't fall. That made no sense to my six year old mind. How could it be easier when the bike was moving? But it's true, isn't it? It's much easier when it's moving.

I think that God often works that way too. This story, although it is the end of the stories about Elijah, is really as story about Elisha. He knows that Elijah is about to leave him. What will happen then? Is Elisha supposed to carry on? Is he supposed to be a prophet like Elijah? Is he supposed to do something different? How does he find out what God's will for him is? He doesn't know what God wants him to do. How many of us do? Do we know what God's will for our lives is? God doesn't give us a written map telling us where to go does he? Should I go to college, or how about the service? Where should I go to college? What career path should I follow? Whom should I marry? Should we have children, and if so, how many? All of us face questions like these. How do we know which is

God's will for us? Do you get a vision in the night? Does God leave you a note on the refrigerator? How do we know God's will for our lives? A few weeks ago we talked about listening for the still small voice, hearing God speak to us in the quiet. But what if you don't hear God that way? Why doesn't Elisha find a place of quiet and listen for God? We can't always find a quiet place, or maybe we're not on the introverted side and we're pretty uncomfortable in the quiet. How do we follow God then?

In the story today, three times Elijah directed Elisha not to continue with him. Three times Elisha says, "I will not leave you." Then Elisha states that he wants a double portion, meaning he wants to be the primary heir, he wants to inherit what Elijah has, he wants to be a prophet like his mentor. But in verse 10, Elijah tells him that he has asked a hard thing and there is no guarantee that he will receive it.

Elisha follows what he understands to be God's will, although he does not know clearly what God's will for him is. Elisha must discern God's will by participating in events. He must watch the chariot and the whirlwind. He must pick up the mantle. He must attempt to part the Jordan. Elisha confirms his call through his actions.¹ He keeps moving. He acts on what he believes to be God's will and God directs him. It's like riding a bike, if we're moving, it's a lot easier.

There are times in our lives when we are faced with the question, "What is God calling me to do in this situation?" When I was in high school, we called this "the Big GW." God's Will. We were pretty self-centered in high school, but I guess many teenagers are. We were preoccupied with our future—would we be going to college? If so where? What did God want us to do? And what about relationships? Should I ask this girl out? What about that girl? What's the big GW? I don't want to blow it and mess up what God's will for my life would be. At one time when I was a senior in high school I was unsure whether to stay in Boulder after I graduated and go to the University of Colorado, or whether I should move to Washington State and go to Whitworth College. Both schools had accepted me, both had offered scholarships, both were fine schools, but which one? Which one did

¹ Spangler, Haywood Barringer, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol. 3, p. 177.*

God want me to go to? What if I went to the wrong one? What if I went to one school and God wanted me to go to the other one? Would I totally mess up my life? There was no sign from God no matter how much I prayed. No still small voice came to me in the quiet. I was stuck. When I mentioned this to my pastor, he said something that I never forgot. He said, "I don't think it works that way. I don't think that God is up there watching us make decisions and when we make a wrong one, he says, "Whoops, you picked wrong, that's it for you." Instead, I think God says to us, "I gave you my Spirit for a reason. Make the best decision you can and I will bless the one you make." In other words, start the bike going and God will help direct us. But just sitting here isn't getting anything done.

Still, that can be scary—make the best decision you can. I think Elisha does that, he follows Elijah and follows God in the best way he knows how to do. It's usually not that hard. We have the Spirit within us and among us. St. Paul says, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit." Paul lays out in Galatians what life in the Spirit looks like. If it looks different from this, then we should look around to see where God might be leading us instead. If our lives or our church or our community or our nation are filled with idolatry, enmity, strife, factions and all the other things that Paul says, then we're probably not following the will of God. He tells us what life in the Spirit is supposed to look like: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. That's what this Christian life is supposed to look like. That's what this church is supposed to look like.

Does it? Not all the time, I guess. We aren't always loving or patient, or generous or faithful. But maybe we're growing in those areas. When I graduated from Seminary our commencement speaker reminded us that all of these things are big goals to have but then he told the story of the author Henry James, once when he was saying good bye to his young nephew Billy, his brother William's son, he said something that the boy never forgot. And of all the things that brilliant and subtle mind might have told the boy, what he did say was this: "There are three things that are important in human life. The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. The third is to be kind." As we sat there that afternoon, he said to us, "In the unlikely event that as the years go by anybody should ever happen to ask

you what it was that the speaker said when he was telling you goodbye on this commencement day, I would be willing to settle for that. Be kind.”²

I remembered that because it is not only one of the nine fruits of the Spirit that Paul mentions, but it seems to me that it is perhaps the one that the others enter the world through. If we start by being kind to one another, by being kind to ourselves, by being kind to our world, by being kind in our public discourse, then we might just find some of the other fruit growing in us. And by being kind we might begin to feel the movement of God's spirit in us—as we are moving toward being kind, God might even be moving us to become loving and joyful and peaceful and all the rest. What's God's will for us? Maybe you don't hear the still, small voice. That's ok. You know how to start, Paul tells us what we're supposed to do, what the Christian community and the Christian life is supposed to look like. We could do worse than by starting our bikes by being kind. In a polarized society and often a divided church we don't often see much kindness out there. But maybe we can begin in here, in this place, and in here, in each of our hearts. We might start our bikes by being kind and we might discover that we are growing up into the fullness of Christ by God's grace.

2 Buechner, Frederick. “*What Will You Be?*” *Commencement Address, Princeton Theological Seminary, May 30, 1984.*