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Templates of Transition, Part 1

Text: 2 Kings 2:1-15

This text describes a relationship between Elijah and Elisha that is reminiscent of the relationship between this church and me.

V.2 The reluctance to leave each other. Sounds like CPC and me.

V.3 Elisha not wanting to even think/talk about leaving his master. Sounds like some here at CPC.

V. 4. Again, Elisha refuses to leave his master.

V. 5 and 3 are similar.

V. 9 An offer and a request. What would you have answered if asked, W*hat may I do for you before I go?* Some would have asked for contact info. Others would have asked for influence. Elisha asks a hard thing: a double portion of Elijah’s spirit.

V. 12. Elijah is Elisha’s spiritual father. When Elijah departed, Elisha went into deep grief mode.

V. 13 The taking up of the mantle and the raising of a profound question. “Where is the God of Elijah?”. Answer: Right here. The God of Elijah is Elisha’s God too. The God who has anointed me and used me and guided me for my 10 years here, is not retiring or moving to Texas.

V.15 an observation: the spirit of Elijah rests upon Elisha. The honor and respect given to Elijah was also given to Elisha. As you have respected and honored and loved me, so I ask you to respect, honor and love your new pastor.

Both Elijah and Elisha are aware of Elijah’s imminent translation. There is no denial here. In his book, *The Denial of Death* Ernest Becker writes,

*Man is literally split in two: he has an awareness of his own splendid uniqueness in that he sticks out of nature with a towering majesty, and yet he goes back into the ground a few feet in order to blindly and dumbly to rot and disappear forever.*

Elijah is not operating out of a delusional place. Neither am I. I am leaving here on the afternoon of January 7, 2024. I will no longer be the Senior Pastor-Teacher of the Crossroads Church at 5587 Redan Road, Stone Mountain, GA 30088. I need to say it. I need to believe it. So do you.

This episode, this text, which describes the relationship between a mentor and a mentee, offers us some practical tips on how to handle a transition and a separation.

1. Acknowledge the reality of what’s happening (v. 1-6). Denial doesn’t help. In her groundbreaking book, *On Death and Dying*, the late Swiss-American psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross suggests five stages of grief:
2. Denial
3. Anger
4. Bargaining
5. Depression
6. Acceptance

We might go through all of these as a pastor and congregation. I am in a state of mourning as I prepare to leave.

1. Leave something to your successor. I turn to the traditions regarding the presidency of the United States of America for some examples here. In what we’ve termed “a smooth transition of power”, our country has put in place certain expectations. There is an Inauguration Day tradition that the outgoing president writes a letter to the incoming president and leaves it on the desk in the Oval Office. The incoming president reads it when he steps into the Oval Office for the first time as president.

Ronald Reagan to George H.W. Bush:

Dear George," the letter read. "You'll have moments when you want to use this particular stationery (The top of the stationery read "Don't let the turkeys get you down," while the bottom of the letter featured a tongue-in-cheek drawing of a cartoon elephant — perhaps in reference to the Republican party's mascot — with turkeys climbing on top of it.)

Well, go to it. George, I treasure the memories we share and wish you all the very best. You'll be in my prayers. God bless you and Barbara. I'll miss our Thursday lunches."

Barack Obama to Donald Trump:

"We are just temporary occupants of this office. That makes us guardians of those democratic institutions and traditions—like rule of law, separation of powers, equal protection, and civil liberties—that our forebears fought and bled for," [Obama wrote](https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2020/11/letters-presidents-their-successors/617089/). "Regardless of the push and pull of daily politics, it's up to us to leave those instruments of our democracy at least as strong as we found them ... And finally, take time, in the rush of events and responsibilities, for friends and family. They'll get you through the inevitable rough patches."

"Michelle and I wish you and Melania the very best as you embark on this great adventure and know that we stand ready to help in any way which we can," he continued. "Good luck and Godspeed."

Elijah doesn’t leave Elisha a letter, but he does leave something for his successor. Elijah leaves Elisha the possibility of endowment for future ministry. It’s in the form of an open question, a blank check.

Look at it in verse 9:

*Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?*

Bible readers, you remember Elisha’s answer, don't you? Elisha asks for a double portion of Elisha’s spirit. Elijah says that’s a big ask, but it is possible. Elijah also leaves his mantle to Elisha (v.8,13)

Elijah leaves three items for his successor.

1. A double portion of his spirit. (v.10-12)
2. His mantle (v.13-14). The mantle was a cloak or robe usually made of animal skin. It was a physical covering and a spiritually symbolic covering.
3. Yahweh’s presence and power. This is more implied by the text than stated. Cf. V.14

 Elisha wants to make sure that Elijah didn’t take God away with him! The presence of The Eternal stays when the servant leaves. By the power of God Elisha goes on to heal a bad water supply (v.19-22). In chapter 4, and succeeding chapters, we read of Elisha performing other miracles. We are reminded of the transition between the ministry of Moses and that of Joshua.

Joshua 1:5

*...as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.*

Beloved, I *will* write a letter for my successor. I will *not* leave a mantle. I will, however, leave the presence of Yahweh here. God is not moving to Dallas with me. God is already there, and God is here and is staying! The same God that anointed my ministry these last ten years, will be here to anoint and enable my successor. Glory!!

**Closing**

In September 2018, Jay McDonald posted an article on [forbes.com](http://forbes.com)., titled The Four Phases of a Successful Leadership Transition. McDonald said the new leader must:

1. Learn
2. Assess
3. Communicate
4. Act

We see those phases in this text.

Hear the good news: as we learn and as we assess and as we communicate, God acts. This God who is at work among us, in this faith community, in this city, in this world, is not leaving here. Oh, good.

Amen