

**Who's Your Daddy? — 2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14**  
**Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV –**  
**30 June 2013 – 6th Sunday after Pentecost**

<sup>2:1</sup> Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. <sup>2</sup> And Elijah said to Elisha, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel.

<sup>6</sup> Then Elijah said to him, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. <sup>7</sup> Fifty men of the sons of the prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. <sup>8</sup> Then Elijah took his cloak and rolled it up and struck the water, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry ground.

<sup>9</sup> When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me." <sup>10</sup> And he said, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so." <sup>11</sup> And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. <sup>12</sup> And Elisha saw it and he cried, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more.

Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. <sup>13</sup> And he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. <sup>14</sup> Then he took the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

I did something last Sunday evening that I did not want to do. But my granddaughters wanted to watch this certain show on television, and I do not ever have claim to the remote control, so I watched it with them.

We watched the live broadcast of Nik Wallenda walking a tightrope across the Grand Canyon. The wire stretched hundreds of feet above the floor of the canyon below, and the walk across the wire lasted almost 23 minutes. There were times when the winds would be so strong that he would kneel down – to get his bearings reestablished, to stop the wobbling of the wire, and to prepare him to stand once more and to keep walking.

I didn't like to watch it, because I am very acrophobic – it doesn't have to be me up high in the air. I can't stand watching the circus performers who performed in front of the symphony inside the modest height of the Clay Center. Sunday evening was a very nerve wracking 23 minutes.

At the end, after Nik literally ran the last few paces to hop off the wire, there was a multitude of interviews – first, obviously, with him, and then with his wife, children, mother and step-father (who talked him through the walk, with a small two way radio microphone and earphone.)

What I found fascinating to watch – after Nik Wallenda’s interview, and the others were being talked to – was Nik in the background, with his back to the camera and the world watching their televisions, standing over by the lip of the canyon, just staring into the abyss. I wanted to know what was going through his head – after it was all over.

In the pre-tightrope walk, talking-heads-filler-time, there was quite a bit of discussion about how Nik’s motivation for this record breaking walk (after having crossed Niagra Falls on a tightrope some few years back) went back to the then record setting tightrope walk Nik’s grandfather Karl Wallenda had attempted, 35 years ago, a mere 121 feet above the ground, between the towers of the ten-story Condado Plaza Hotel in San Juan, Peurto Rico.

Karl Wallenda had been 73 years old, when (as the 5<sup>th</sup> generation of this daredevil family) he fell to his death on that day in 1978. The next day, I watched on **“You Tube”** the actual video (in real time **and** in slow motion) of that fateful day when Karl Wallenda took his last walk. As much as I hated watching Nik walk across the Grand Canyon, I confess that the 1978 video was captivating.

The elder Wallenda had fallen, as he was coming out of one of those kneel down movements to regain control over a wobbly tightrope.

I suddenly knew what Nik Wallenda had been doing, after the June 23 walk, standing over by the lip of the canyon. I felt like I somehow knew that he was remembering his walk and his grandfather’s walk, in stereo, or side-by-side, or somehow joined together. He had done it. He had honored his grandfather’s memory, his grandfather’s life.

He had received a double portion of Karl’s spirit – just like Elisha had asked to receive from Elijah.

Today’s scripture closes out this study of the life of Elijah, which began in sermons here on June 2. Elijah was a fascinating prophet, who moved from spectacular, miraculous battle on Mount Carmel, with the prophets of Ba’al (his “Lord,

God, the Bull! Moment) to the closely followed mental breakdown and run for his life to the mountain, where he encountered God in the still small voice of the sounds of silence. If you recall, his rescue from that depression contained God's commissioning him to go and do final battle with wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel (which we examined last Sunday.) But his commission also involved going and picking up (and mentoring) his successor, Elisha.

Today's scripture brings about the culmination of that transition from Elijah's career to Elisha's career. Elijah is the only First Testament prophet who we are told was ascended into heaven and did not taste death. Indeed later prophets, like Malachi, (as well as Jesus) prophesied that Elijah would return as the forerunner to the Messiah.

Elisha wanted a double portion of his spiritual father's spirit, as he attempted to walk in his daddy's spiritual footsteps.

We all have our "spiritual daddys" or "spiritual mothers," and this passage reminded me of the contemporary colloquialism, ***"Who's your daddy?"***

Who is yours?

Who's portion of spirit do you carry?

One night recently, as I was talking with my mother in her apartment -- out of the clear blue -- she said to me, ***"You know, you're looking more and more like your father all the time."***

Really? – I'm taller, heavier, wear a beard, have much longer hair than he ever wore, and we differ in so many ways. And yet, I knew, and so I did not argue: I am my father's son. His fingerprints are all over my life.

Elijah's were all over Elisha's.

Who's your daddy? Who's spirit have you inherited?

Oh, we don't have to be the same, in order to be the spiritual legatee. But we all carry the marks, that shape us.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, whenever the Jews were threatened with disaster, the founder of the Hasidic movement of Judasim, Rabbi Yisroel (Israel) ben Eliezer (affectionately called “the Baal Shem Tov”) would go to a certain place in the forest, light a fire, and say a special prayer. Always a miracle would occur, and the disaster would be averted.

In the later times when disaster threatened, the Maggid of Mezritch, the Baal Shem Tov’s disciple, would go to the same place in the forest and say, “**Master of the Universe, I do not know how to light the fire, but I can say the prayer.**” And again the disaster would be averted.

Still later, his disciple, Moshe Leib of Sasov, would go to the same place in the forest and say, “**Lord of the World, I do not know how to light the fire or say the prayer, but I know the place and that must suffice.**” And it always did.

When *Israel of Rizhyn* needed intervention from heaven on behalf of his people, he would say to G-d, “**I no longer know the place, nor how to light the fire, nor to say the prayer, but I can tell the story and that must suffice.**” . . . And it did.

This story has been handed down by the Hasidim to make the point: Remember the story, tell it, pass it on.

As Bishop S. Clifton Ives, who served God among the West Virginia Annual Methodists, used to say: **Remember: we may not be the best qualified to do this, but we are the ones who are here and who have the responsibility of doing it. We can’t wait until the best qualified ones come along. Right now, in this place, at this time, we ARE the ones best qualified to do it.**

Elisha would not get a double portion of Elijah’s spirit, unless he paid attention, and saw what he was meant to see.

**You and I may not be the same as the mothers and fathers whose spirit we have inherited, but we still need to pay attention to God at work among us, and pass it along.**

We may not be able to do what they did, but we have our role to play, our part of the story to pass along. Indeed, the way our spiritual mentors lived their roles would

probably not work today as it did for them. Elisha's job was not to be Elijah. His job was to be Elisha.

**Perhaps the greater question is not "Who's your daddy?" or "Who's your mama?" as it is: "*Who is THEIR daddy?*" and "*Who is THEIR mama?*"**

These children today making this wonderful Vacation Bible School have been blessed by many adult leaders and teachers who have helped them to learn the story. And this is a good thing.

I am concerned, however, about their ability to continue to pay attention to the Story on a consistent basis.

You know the **television commercial about the father or the mother, who encounters the television character and says, "You know, I'm going to block you from the television, because I don't think it's good for my children to watch the message you are putting out."**

It's like that.

These children don't have the ability to drive themselves to Sunday School, and to be in Church, and to do things like the wonderful mission trip our youth just completed -- in order to pay attention and to learn the story.

They ARE going to pay attention to somebody, however.

**In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit**, I ask you: **Who's your Daddy? And – more importantly -- who's THEIR Daddy?**