

SERMON FOR THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: 26 JUNE 2016 - ALL SAINTS PARISH, FOURWAYS

Theme: We are all called to serve God and others lovingly

1. Introduction

Let us pray

God of love and mercy, we come before your throne in praise and thanksgiving and acknowledge your presence. Thank you for this day and that by your grace we are all gathered here to come and worship you.

I pray that we may open ourselves to the work that the Holy Spirit wants to accomplish today, and all to be guided to continually renew our minds, replacing our thoughts by thoughts expressed in your word. AMEN!

Greetings

A very good morning to you all here at All Saints! I am excited, delighted and grateful once more to be here. Thank you to you all for affording me the opportunity to share with you the spark of light ... that I encounter as I walk together with Christ my redeemer. It's been a long time and hope that once more we can connect – I am more that confident that we certainly will...for we strive to live the faith we profess and trust God's promise of eternal life.

2. Body

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are all called to serve in the Kingdom of God. Let us listen to God speak!

A thorough in-depth look at both the readings from the book of Kings and Gospel of St Luke that have just been read indicates some parallels. If we look at the parallels, a person/s is/are being prepared for a godly role before a predecessor could depart from this world into the heavenly places. However, as the narrative continues we find some contrasts in the manner in which Elisha and Christ disciples responds to their calling. On the other hand, Elisha portrays some parallels with Christ Jesus both in his response to his calling and in the path he followed in his ministry including the miracles he performed.

Let's begin with the parallels: Elisha somehow emulated Christ character in several ways. **1.** Distressed as he was, we see him responding to the prophets from Bethel and Jericho to keep **quiet** to the fact that Elijah will be taken from him by God, something that Jesus himself told those that he healed many a times during his ministry. Yet, the Good News went **viral** in today's language and more and more people came to believe his message of salvation. In a way Elisha actually foreshadowed Christ who was to come as the savior of the world. **2.** It is also significant that **Bethany** (Math 21:17) and **Jericho** (Mat 20:29) are also the places where Jesus spent some time before he could proceed to Jerusalem to be crucified – a

painful experience that came to save all humanity to eternal life. **3.**The **baptism of Jesus** also took place in the **Jordan River** where upon him getting out of the river ' **he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove**' as Gospel of St Mark attest in Chapter 1:10. Similarly when Elisha struck the waters in the Jordan River with Elijah's cloak the river '**divided**' and he went across (2 Kings 2:14). This parallel in particular takes us to the **climax** in the narrative that displays God's power in its fullness.

What is God's message in these parallels? God is saying to us He was, is and will be forever. Do we see the Elisha (God) amongst us or in us? Without a doubt if we look carefully, listen and listen we will find him for he dwells in places we least expect. Let me share a story to expand on this. I recently witnessed an incident on a very cold wet day on my drive from Midrand to Centurion on R101 road. The traffic was standstill and one lady pulled off the road because her wipers had malfunctioned. Embarrassed as she was, she approached a group of young men who have been standing on the pavement soaking wet as the taxis were not available for quite some time. You could read in their faces that they needed help but all of us '**falsely secured**' in our cars were indifferent to their silent cry. Eventually the lady got assistance and I am not sure if she gave them a lift there after or not. These young men portrayed God's presence in them hence they could serve the lady lovingly without retaliating for her not coming to their aid when they needed it most. Serving God is not only about paying in our comfortable homes or worshiping in churches but attending to the needs of our communities out there as the young men did to the desperate lady on the road.

Secondly we are truly blessed because we are living in an era where Christ as a gift of love from God has already come. All what we have to do is to accept this gift **freely** and share it with those around us (without trying to earn it by good deeds). It is done! It is finished! (John 19:30). The latter are the words that Jesus said as his spirit was released the last time on the cross and we should take them seriously. We have been **freed** through Christ in faith from the bondage of sin to serve others in and **love but** not to do what our **sinful nature desires**.

However this freedom is often abused and misinterpreted particularly as it relates to the law by us Christians. **1.** To clarify this point Jesus in his words at Sermon on the Mount said to his disciples '**I did not come to abolish the Law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose**' (Mat 5: 17). In simple terms this means that Jesus himself as Love in human form came to fulfill what the prophets said about him in the Old Testament. Key to his teaching was that Jesus came to renew and perfect the Law of Moses. Yet we see the Jews wanting to exclude Gentile Christians from the gift of salvation on the basis of their ceremonial law of circumcision. **2.** Jesus further clarifies this point in his reply to the Pharisees who questioned him about the greatest Commandment '**You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and with your entire mind. A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself**' (Mt 22:37-40)

What does this **freedom mean** to us when called to serve? The keyword is Love! This puts another challenge to us. How can we love those who do so much wrong so many times to us including our enemies as Christ has taught us? We should pray to the spirit at all times guidance and direction. What is even more encouraging is that the spirit intercedes for us when we do not have the words to utter. What a privilege! As we continue walking in the spirit we will miraculously reap the fruits that reflect Christ character; **LOVE**, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We will then be able to love and serve those that wrong us thus fulfilling God's greatest commandment (loving others like we love ourselves unconditionally).

Let's now focus on the contrasts between Elisha and the Disciples of Christ. Firstly, **Elisha** had never seen Christ face to face but took over his prophetic role after Israel was divided and was declining towards idol worship (Baal) as a result of influence from kings that reined at the time. The environment was tense due to killings of King Ahaziah and his soldiers prior to Elijah handing over to Elisha as a prophet to Israel. All these factors created a lot of doubt and uncertainty in the minds of Christians of the time. Yet, Elisha **obeyed and in faith** accepted his prophetic role trusting God's guidance to take him through. As a result he reined for 50 years. He also healed the sick, raised the dead, and blinded the Aramean army and many more miracles.

By contrast, **Jesus disciples** had been with Christ for quite some time, had the opportunity to learn from his teachings and witnessed the many miracles that He performed at the time he was with them. Yet, they still could not grasp the message of the good news/his mission, the **irony** being the fact that he was the **pinnacle** of it all! This is portrayed in their jealousy to those who cast out demons from those who were possessed for they had in some instances failed in that regard. **James and John** in particular wanted to retaliate by calling **fire** from heaven to burn the Samaritans who rejected Jesus hospitality on his way Jerusalem. Paradoxically, Elisha witnessed the **chariots of fire** in which God revealed **the saints of Israel** that carried Elijah to heaven, which portrayed an everlasting life in contrast to James and John wanting to use **fire** to destroy the Samaritans.

God is without a doubt speaking to us through these contrasts!

Firstly serving Christ comes at a cost. Like Elisha we too will without a doubt face some challenges, obstacles and distractions but we should persevere, be obedient and in faith focus on the task at hand. We also need to be prepared to embrace these challenges with a sacrifice and a spirit of a suffering servant like Jesus did on the cross for our redemption.

Secondly we too as members of the body of Christ should learn from Jesus Disciples and not allow our positions in the church to make us **proud and condescending**, but rather embrace the **gift of love** that Jesus offered us on the cross and share it with our neighbors (i.e. colleagues, superiors and community at large) irrespective of who they are, where they come from the position they hold. Heavy as it is, we have to march on, for as we suffer we identify with him on the cross, a painful but rewarding experience that we cannot afford to miss if we are to serve him and others lovingly.

Like the disciples, we should not utilize God's given resources to the destruction of mankind but to serve him and others lovingly thus glorifying his name. As we do so he will reveal his fullness to us that will give us joy as we serve him and others.

3. Conclusion.

Having listened to God's message, let's ponder on this question:

Are we prepared to carry the baton from a contemporary Elijah to Christ calling as Elisha did or are we hoping (to an extent of praying about it!) deep down in our hearts that God never calls 'ME' to his mission? Irrespective of our **fears** and the '**false hope**' we whisper quietly in our ears, we as members of Christ body i.e. church are part of a **big puzzle** and have a role to play for Christ mission to be accomplished. In his letter to the Romans 12: 4 – 5 Paul says '**Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong together.**' In order for the parts of this puzzle to fit into each other all have to participate by utilizing our God given **spiritual gifts**. These are God given gifts unique to individuals that we should utilize in our daily lives but most importantly in running the church in a harmonious manner (1 Cor 12:7).

However as David Pawson writes in his book titled 'Unlocking the Bible' the **fruit of the spirit** is limited without the **gift of the spirit**' and vice versa. It is not enough to show love and kindness (both fruits of the spirit) by visiting a sick /distressed friend in hospital. We have to take it further and utilize God given spiritual gifts for holistic healing to take place. In this instance one could pray, teach or sing (**all spiritual gifts**) to the sick person depending on her/his needs.

So by default we are all called to make His kingdom come! We have no excuse. There is no one in this world that does not have a **spiritual gift**. **The challenge remains "Have we identified them and if so, do we use them for advancing God mission in harmony with the other members of the church/community or to EXCLUDE, ISOLATE, UNDERMINE, DISCRIMINATE, CORRUPT to a point of PERSECUTING others? Let's spend the week reflecting and seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance as we ponder on this question....so as to find our fit in the puzzle.**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as we are being called to serve, let us willingly and courageously embrace the gift of love that was freely offered to us on the cross, seek guidance from the Holy Spirit so that we may be able to serve those that are in most need of this love in the darkest corners of our communities and the broader society.

4. Closing

May these words be a healing and blessing to us all as we respond and act upon it. AMEN!

Imelda Kekana (11/July/2016)