INTRODUCTION

When I move to Ogden next month, I will miss you folks here at Wesley very much. But you're not the only ones I'll miss. After living in Pueblo for 14 years, I have a lot of friends in this community. So I've been busy saying good-bye to them, as well. On Thursday afternoon, I went to visit a couple who have been friends of mine for eight years. The husband has cancer, and is now receiving Hospice care. So, my visit to them was to say good-bye in more ways than one. The three of us had a nice visit, catching up on life and health details, and commiserating about concerns and troubles. We laughed and cried as we reflected on our mortality and thanked God in prayer that there are some things like truth, goodness, and love that are eternal. Even when a move to Utah or a cancerous death separate us from each other, God's Spirit in and through us is enduring and strong.

This is sermon number three in my five-sermon series on Transition. In the first sermon, I reminded you of Jesus' words to his disciples before he died and was taken away from them: "Do not be troubled." In the second sermon, I told you the story of mother Hannah, who gave her loved one, her precious son Samuel, to God. Today, we turn our attention to the story from Second Kings, chapter 2, where we read about the older prophet Elijah informing his younger apprentice Elisha that they would be parting ways. Because the transition seems to have gone well, let's study it a bit this morning. Let's see what we might learn about inheriting the Spirit in our times of transition.
1. COMMUNICATING CLEARLY

The first pointer that we get from this story of Elijah and Elisha is that inheriting the Spirit comes by communicating clearly. Did you notice how many times Elijah told Elisha that he was going away? First, Elijah said the Lord was sending him to Bethel. Next, Elijah told Elisha that the Lord had sent him to Jericho. Then, Elijah said that the Lord had sent him to the Jordan River. Finally, Elijah asked Elisha what he could do for him before he would be taken away. Do you hear the repetition of the theme? Do you hear the regularity of the transition conversation? Elijah wasn't vague. He spoke clearly that he was going away.

Likewise, the company of prophets was clear in their communication. Every time Elijah said the Lord was sending him away, the company of prophets asked Elisha, "Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master from you today?" They didn't ask this question to rub salt into Elisha's wound. They weren't trying to hurt him. They were simply reinforcing Elijah's message. They were doing their part in communicating clearly what was about to happen.

When we're facing a difficult transition, someone in the situation has to speak truth plainly. Just think about life and death. There's a much more peaceful and successful transition if Mom or Dad have a living will and have spoken clearly about what end-of-life measures they do or don't want--so the children don't have to agonize or argue with each other about what to do. And, after the death, there's a lot more likelihood of an inheritance of the Spirit if the inheritance of material goods has been spelled out clearly in a will--so brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and cousins aren't all fighting over Grandma's jewelry or Grandpa's tools. Communicating clearly is primarily the responsibility of the one who is leaving, but it certainly can be supported by a team of people--doctors, lawyers, Hospice workers, pastors, relatives, and friends--who are all on the same page.
I suppose that's one of the reasons why all the clergy of the Rocky Mountain Conference are asked to read and sign a particular ethics document when we are leaving a church. That document clearly states that, once we've moved to a new appointment, we are not to be involved in the previous congregation any longer. We are not supposed to go back to do funerals, weddings, or baptisms. We are not even supposed to spend much time in conversations with the previous congregational members, as all those things interfere with the congregation developing a good relationship with the new pastor. In some ways, that ethics policy seems harsh. But it was developed through wisdom gained in the school of hard knocks. Communicating clearly is necessary for inheriting the Spirit in times of transition.

2. ALLOWING TIME FOR GRIEF

A second means of inheriting the Spirit at times of transition is allowing time for grief. Not everyone is ready or able to embrace clarity of communications right away. In our Bible story, we can see that Elisha repeatedly tried to shut the conversation down. Maybe he thought that if they didn't talk about it, the separation wouldn't happen. But Elisha was wrong. Elijah did finally leave him. But the good news was that, by then, the pain was reduced by the repeated conversation and the time that had passed. By then, Elisha had been allowed some time for processing his grief.

Certain feelings or characteristics are a normal part of the grief experience. It's normal to want to deny that which hurts us. Denial is one of our best human defense mechanisms that shields us from pain until we're strong enough to handle whatever is happening to us. Another common feeling is anger over things we can't control.

Another normal and very positive process of grieving is making the most of our time together before it's over. By going with Elijah to Bethel, Jericho, and the Jordan River, Elisha
got a little more quality time with his mentor and friend. Grieving that is done in advance of death allows for lots of loyal and devoted hours remembering the past, transferring knowledge from one person to the other, asking "What do you need before I go?" That might mean teaching a husband how to cook, teaching a wife how to get the oil changed in the car, or teaching a child where the important banking and insurance papers are kept.

Allowing for grief might mean participating in a send-off the way Elisha witnessed Elijah go up in a whirlwind and a chariot of fire.Allowing for grief might mean tearing our clothes and tearing from our eyes. Allowing for grief might mean allowing ourselves and others the space to ask Elisha's painful question, "Where now is the Lord?" At times of loss and transition, it's only natural and human to wonder if we have been abandoned by God. That doesn't mean we've lost our faith forever. It just means that, right then, we are overwhelmed with the very normal feelings of grief. Allowing time and space for grief is an essential part of inheriting the Spirit in times of transition.

3. PICKING UP RESPONSIBILITIES

After communicating clearly about the transition and allowing time for grief, there's one more thing that needs to happen. In order to inherit the Spirit, we also have to get busy picking up responsibilities. The good news is that all our grieving does eventually pay off. Eventually feelings of life return to us. Eventually we start to feel more energy and hope. Eventually we notice what has fallen down around us, and we realize that it's our responsibility to take up roles and duties left to us by those who have gone ahead.

Fortunately, we aren't expected to part the water on our own. We're able to do what needs done because when we pick up the cloak--the mantle, the responsibilities--we also inherit God's Spirit of power. In Elisha's case, he asked to inherit a double portion of God's Spirit. But
he wouldn't have received it if he hadn't been willing to give it a try. Did you notice which came first? It wasn't the feeling of God's powerful presence. It was only after Elisha picked up the cloak and hit the water with it that he saw the evidence that the God's Spirit was with him. If we hold back from responsibilities, waiting for the feeling of spiritual strength--waiting for some kind of charismatic confidence to go forward--we may never receive the Spirit we desire. Sometimes we just have to act on the need that we see, and when we do, we discover that Holy Spirit is already right there with us, giving us the power that we require.

On Sunday, July 14, your new pastor, Rev. Emilie Forward, will be standing up here leading worship with you for the first time. She will pick up and put on the clergy stole as a sign that she has responded to the call of God to a particular set of ministerial responsibilities. I hope, like the company of prophets, you will affirm that the Spirit of the Lord is, indeed, resting on her. But I also hope that you won't leave too many duties to your new pastor. You, maybe even better than she, will have the ability to look around and notice what has fallen to the ground and needs to be picked up. You too can receive the Spirit of God to do things that, before, you didn't know you could do. So, I certainly hope you won't leave things lying in a heap. In this transition, I hope you will inherit the Spirit by picking up responsibilities.

**CONCLUSION**

On Memorial Day weekend, it's natural for us to feel some sorrow for our loved ones who have died or moved away. But their spirit doesn't have to be lost from us. The Spirit of God which was in them can also be with us if we are willing to communicate clearly, allow time for grief, and pick up responsibilities. The transitions from them to us and us to the next generation can be successful and smooth, if we follow these guidelines for inheriting the Spirit.