

Sermon 29 June 2 025 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Third Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: 2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14; Psalter: UMH 798 -- Psalm 77:1-2, 6-14; Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-62

Sermon

I never cease to be impressed with the freedom of the pulpit!

I have to say what I believe ... but you have to decide what to make of it!

A hymn, a worry, something you just heard ... anything can translate what I say into your own version ...and God is at work throughout the whole process, giving you the chance to turn it into love and courage and positive influence on others.

So, with that in mind, let me say what's first on my heart this week.

Our District Superintendent, Wanda Bynum Duckett, retired, and we had two gatherings to honor and face up to that. The first was Tuesday, when all us clergy in the Baltimore Metropolitan District met with her, mostly on "Zoom," to acknowledge, celebrate, and give thanks for that. It was a free exchange, and I've never been part of an organization that was so free, and respectful, and honest, and truly grateful about the business they had at hand.

Then yesterday, all the laity and clergy on the district were invited to Grace United Methodist Church, Charles Street and University Parkway, to acknowledge and reflect and pray and share on the same matter ... and by golly, I experienced the same joy and gratitude, and inspiration, and beauty in that setting as I did on Tuesday.

I offer these comments to each of you just so you know that, in these dark times when people everywhere are so bent and broken and worried and confused that we wonder ... and I offer just one comment Rev. Duckett herself made that I found quite inspiring. She said, "Not one church on this district withdrew from the denomination, and I think that's because we were so focused on being the church in the fullest sense that we didn't have time for that!" ... or anyway, that's what she said as I heard it, and we all made noises to agree.

So folks, I offer you that good news, and expect and pray God will turn that into the inspiration you need this Sunday to go forth and work with, praise God, hallelujah!

Then we can examine the Bible verses a bit, starting with the last one, the Gospel lesson from Luke, and hearing the commentator say for the next four months Jesus will be focused on the life of discipleship as "a pilgrimage, and those who follow can expect to share in the fate of Jesus." *(Silence, and maybe a few comments here)*

Then go back to the first lesson, and see how intent Elisha was to follow his teacher Elijah, and how he was rewarded with what he asked forLet that be a sign for each of us to meditate on this week ...God does answer honest prayer, in all God's special ways for each of us as individuals, and in groups as well. (more silence, and speaking if needed).

Then on this recognition-day of our nation's founding next week, teach us, God, how to pray as we face the hard times our national soul is going through, and pray for the gift of understanding and also of firmly standing for justice and applying it with lovegifts we so much need ... (more silence and comments as needed). Let Paul's word in Galatians abide: Choose freedom, as it has come to us, and extend it and abide by it, to those most in need of it: Those in prison, those struggling with addiction and poverty, and on and on as the list extends in our lives of faith.

And finally, let the psalm, with all its confronting of the fearfulness and the beauty of our lives in Jesus, as we walk with him in his risen presence, and find our own uplifting energy coming strong as we pray and walk, and stumble and rise again to follow ... (Pray some more).

Amen, thanks, hallelujah.