

Who will succeed?



Margaret Marshall *reflects on* 2 Kings 2:1-12 and Mark 9:2-9

If you move in corporate circles you may hear the term “succession management”. It describes a process for identifying and developing new leaders to replace those who leave or retire. Although it’s a relatively new term, it’s clear from today’s readings that the process is not new at all.

In today’s reading from 2 Kings, God has prompted the elderly prophet Elijah to pass on his important role to young Elisha. But as Elijah carries out the last of his duties, the local competition tries to put his protégé off: “You’re just not up to it,” the “professional” prophets seem to say. Elisha ignores them, asking for Elijah’s spiritual strength to succeed.

Centuries later, at the pivotal point of Mark’s Gospel, we find Jesus’ chosen successors moving closer to the handover of his mission. Thus far the twelve have not impressed. Despite Peter’s inspired assertion that Jesus is the Messiah, nobody really understands the implications. When Peter, James and John are granted evidence of their teacher’s true identity in a radiant mountaintop vision, they are intimidated.

We, successors in God’s vast restoration project, sometimes seem equally unpromising. Lent offers Christians an opportunity to reflect on this. Self-appraisal, even “in-service training” are the order of these days. Yet the voice we must listen for is that of the Holy Spirit, reminding us that we have been chosen and that, however modest our gifts, we’re already equipped to carry on God’s work. ☺

Lord, as we prepare for Lent, help us to see how we can draw upon the wisdom and inspiration of the prophets and generations of men and women of faith, and play a meaningful role in furthering your kingdom. Guide us in the next weeks as we seek to deepen our faith. Amen.

Retirement *Lifelong service*

by Julia McGuinness

“Retirement isn’t an option for Christians,” wrote a friend, mourning the death of a beloved Christian evangelist who’d continued sharing his faith with his carers to the very end.

The Bible does not address retirement directly, though the Old Testament tells us that Levites working in the Tabernacle were to step down from regular service into a less strenuous assistant role when they reached fifty (Numbers 8:24-25). In the New Testament,

Paul calls older believers to live as examples of godliness for the younger generation: men were to be “temperate, serious, prudent, and sound in faith, in love,” while women were instructed to “teach what is good” (Titus 2:2-3). A waning of physical strength is compensated by gains in spiritual wisdom.

We cannot make generalisations about God’s call. In her eighties, Anna’s vocation was a Temple-based prayer ministry; Moses’ octogenarian commission was to lead God’s people out of Egypt. ☺

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

Matthew 5:7-8

Ashes to ashes

by Caroline Hodgson

If you go to church on Wednesday you will probably have a sign of the cross marked on your forehead in ashes made of the crosses from Palm Sunday last year.

Ashes and dust are powerfully symbolic in Christian and Jewish traditions. Since the very beginning of time, they have been associated with embodied humanity. In the book of Genesis (2:7) we are told that God formed Adam from dust. Not long

after this (3:19), however, God punishes Adam by returning him to the ground: “you are dust, and to dust you shall return”.

Ashes became an outward sign of grief, desolation and ruin, used symbolically in rituals to denote humility and submission to God. In Daniel 9:3 we read: “Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.”

A good Lenten practice this year might be to read this verse every day, and ask yourself if you are living the spirit of Lent. ☺