

## **The Spirit Will Remain**

*February 19, 2012*

(Last Epiphany – Year B)

2 Kings 2: 1-12

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

The prophet Elijah is a mentor to Elisha.

In our Old Testament lesson today, Elijah is about to be taken up to heaven in a whirlwind.

Yet before Elijah is taken away, Elijah and Elisha go on a tour of Hebrew landmarks.

Elijah and Elisha travel to Bethel.

They go to Jericho.

They go to the Jordan River.

At each point in their journey, Elisha tells his mentor Elijah:

“As the Lord lives, and you yourself live, I will not leave you.”

Elisha promises to remain.

And even though Elijah departs in a whirlwind, Elijah's spirit will remain.

In the Diocese of Texas, we usually have 3 bishops.

Andy Doyle is our diocesan bishop.

And there are two other bishops, called bishops suffragan.

Each bishop suffragan has an area of oversight in our very large diocese.

Bishop Rayford High had oversight in the east region, including Tyler and Longview, all the way down to Beaumont and including the northern suburbs of Houston.

Yet last April, Bishop Rayford High retired.

And this last weekend, the clergy and lay delegates of the Council of the Diocese of Texas met in Bryan.

The Council approved to hold an election on June 2 - to elect a new bishop suffragan.

And so, my brothers and sisters, I want you to know –

That I will be nominated for Bishop Suffragan of Texas.

I make this announcement after much prayer – and with a deep sense of calling upon my life.

Beginning last summer, clergy colleagues started to approach me – one by one – each believing that I would be a good candidate for bishop.

Over this last fall, these voices have grown stronger and more numerous. Susan and I began to discern and to pray.

And we have concluded that I am being called to be nominated as Bishop Suffragan of Texas.

Of course, this brings up the question:

What does this mean to you and to St. Alban's?

Your vestry and I met in retreat at Camp Allen yesterday to explore the two scenarios.

First, let me address what will happen if I am *not* elected by the clergy and people of the Diocese of Texas to be one of our bishops.

If I am not elected on Saturday, June 2, then I will be disappointed.

Yet I would also realize that the Holy Spirit has spoken and has chosen someone else to lead in East Texas.

If I am not elected, I will still be the rector of St. Alban's, a vocation that I truly love.

And if I am not elected, then I will need for you to not leave me, but to remain with me and my family.

However, if I am not elected bishop, I will also need to take some time off this summer to regroup with my family and to take some sabbatical time that I have accrued.

If I am not elected bishop, then I will re-charge my spiritual batteries this summer - to come back in the fall fully energized to lead this parish and you, just as I have for the last 6 years.

If I am not elected, then I will remain.

Now, let me address what will happen if I *am* elected as bishop on June 2:

The election will be held at Christ Church Cathedral in Houston, where bishops have been elected from our diocese for over a century.

And if I am elected by a majority of the clergy and a majority of the lay delegates present, then I believe that the Holy Spirit will have chosen me to serve as a bishop in the church of God.

If I am elected bishop, then I would be finished with my time as rector of St. Alban's, with festive worship services here on St. Alban's Day: Sunday, June 24.

If I am elected as bishop, I would move to Tyler, with oversight in the East Texas region.

I would be consecrated as a bishop in a worship service of great solemnity and significance in Tyler, on Saturday, October 6.

It would be my expectation that all of you would make the road trip on October 6 to support me and my family, just as you always support us.

And the Holy Spirit will be present and will remain.

If I am elected as bishop, Susan and John and I would have to work out creative arrangements for how to spend our time in the next year, because we have pledged to John that he will remain for his senior year to graduate from Midway High School in 2013.

However, my family and I agree that the opportunity to serve as a bishop in this diocese that I dearly love does not come around often.

So we would make the sacrifices, as a family, to make it work for us.

Your vestry and I are already discussing what would happen to St. Alban's from a clergy leadership perspective, if I am elected as bishop.

As I said at our annual parish meeting last month, Jimmy will most likely have moved on to become a rector of his own church.

And most likely an interim rector would be employed while you went through the search process for a new rector.

And the Holy Spirit will remain.

For 6 years now, I have stood in this pulpit and continually challenged you to take up the cross, to take a huge risk and to follow Jesus, even into the unknown.

And I want you to know that your rector is now taking a giant, heaping gulp of the medicine that I regularly dish out from this pulpit.

I am walking into a journey where I really have no assurances if I will be elected as a bishop or not.

Yet I do believe that I am being faithful, faithful to a new calling that the Holy Spirit has put into my heart, and into the heart of my family, and into the hearts of many across the Diocese of Texas who are nominating me and who are encouraging me to be their bishop.

The Holy Spirit will not leave us and will remain with us.

And during these coming months of uncertainty, I need for you to remain with me.

I need for you to remain with each other.

I need for you to remain in the Spirit of Jesus, saying to our Lord and Savior:

“As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.”

The mentor Elijah is taken away in a whirlwind, yet Elisha has the courage to watch his departure.

Clergy come and go, yet lay people have the courage to remain to be the church.

For no matter what happens to Jimmy and to me, the Holy Spirit will not leave us.

The Holy Spirit of Jesus will remain.

AMEN.

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