

Thomas R. Cook
St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota
8:00 and 10:00 a.m. Celebrations of Holy Eucharist
The Third Sunday after Pentecost; June 30, 2019

“Just Enough”

Scripture: 2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14 (3 Pentecost C, Proper 8C, RCL)

Note: Preached on the Sunday of Amelia Arthur's first celebration of Holy Eucharist as priest and celebrant.

"Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you," the prophet Elijah says to his companion, Elisha. Now... I've always been a little puzzled by Elisha's response. He says to the famous prophet, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." A double share. A double "portion" is the way I learned it growing up reading the King James Bible. That's what it says... "Let me inherit a *double portion* of your spirit." Now, I sort of understand that, because I'm used to asking for a double portion, but I'm usually asking at a restaurant or at the dining room table, not traveling down the road with some important minister of God. But it does sort of make me think... Is Elisha asking to be twice as good as Elijah? Is he asking to overshadow his mentor? To be twice as powerful as the great Elijah? And why would he do that? Why would he want that? I mean, did Elisha have visions of grandeur, a desire for fame, a lust for power?

Did he think Elijah only did half as much as he should have, so Elisha would need to do twice as much more, so a double portion of spirit was needed? I'm really not sure. I mean, just how much "spirit" do we need?

And all this got me to thinking, of course, about, well... Amelia. Just in case you haven't heard... Amelia was ordained priest in the Episcopal Church this past Tuesday evening. It was glorious! Bishop Prior put his hands upon her head, while dozens of her clergy colleagues surrounded her and laid hands upon her and pressed down upon her, and hundreds of people in the cathedral were praying silently, including a whole bunch of people of St. Stephen's Church, and the bishop fervently and loudly implored of God "...give your Holy Spirit to Amelia; fill her with grace and power, and make her a priest in your Church." And I'm thinking... *Well, maybe this is it. Wouldn't this be the perfect time to just go ahead and ask the bishop for a double portion of that Spirit right now?* Just go ahead and get all super-powered and ready to do astonishing things in the church. Twice as much as usual.

But, you know, with all due respect to Elisha, I'm not so sure it works that way. I'm not so sure a double share of the Spirit guarantees that we ministers, or any of you for that matter, are any more holy, any more powerful, or any more capable than any other faithful child of God. In fact, I like the way Bishop Phillips Brooks of Massachusetts puts it sometime back in the late 1800s when he thinks about what it takes to live this life of a committed follower of Jesus. He doesn't seek any double portion or any particularly special power. Instead he basically says for all of us to ask for... enough. To pray for just enough for whatever work God gives us to do. *"Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers," Brooks says. "Pray for powers equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle, but you shall be the miracle."* Whatever God calls us to do, whomever God calls us to be... be it priest, parent, friend, spouse, caregiver, teacher, leader, helper, healer... whatever... we need only welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives in order to accomplish what God asks of us. And maybe sometimes what God asks of us is a lot. Life certainly can

challenge us. But the promise is that the Holy Spirit will provide all the power we need should we choose to live a faithful life as followers of Jesus.

So, today we start a new chapter in faithful life and ministry with Amelia, recently ordained priest in Christ's Church. But, you know, we priests are not called to serve you from some elevated position of spiritual excess that is not available to the people in the pews. I don't believe we have a double portion of God's Spirit... unless, perhaps, we have that double portion for one purpose, and that is in order to share that portion of the Spirit with you, to walk the journey of faith with you, surely called to guide, to encourage, to teach and bless and care. But Amelia and I remain servants and followers of Jesus with you. And you teach us how to be faithful, and you share your portion of the Spirit with us, and that makes the life of faith in community rich and wonderful. And we can be sure that together our power as St. Stephen's Church is equal to whatever task God will set before us. And we can be sure in our own lives that we will receive

the strength we need, because whatever power we have is the gift of the Spirit... not too much, not too little, but just what we need. Just enough.

Yesterday, Amelia officiated her first funeral as a priest, and she wisely chose words to share with the family gathered... words, as best I can tell, attributed to Erma Bombeck, an American humorist and author, but by some attributed to actress Marilyn Monroe, interestingly enough. But in any case, the words are worth taking to heart. Amelia shared this vision of a faithful life...

"When I stand before God at the end of my life I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, so I could say, 'I used everything you gave me.'"

And that is what we are called to do.