

PARALLEL PATHS

I'm reading in the book of 2 Kings right now, specifically at the point where the prophet Elijah has finished his ministry and (literally) handed over his mantle to his successor, Elisha. It would be hard to find two more different men. Elijah was a mercurial, emotional man who appeared out of the desert in dramatic fashion, wearing dramatic clothes, and preached powerful sermons. Though Elijah did a few miracles, mostly his ministry was preaching.

Elisha, on the other hand, hardly speaks at all, and when he does, it's usually one or two lines, sent by the hand of a messenger. He doesn't live in the desert; he has his own house. He doesn't go to kings; they come to him. He's best known for performing miracles. He heals a Syrian general of leprosy, helps a monastic community find good water, provides a miraculous antidote to poison, and once makes an iron axhead float, so that the man who dropped it there can retrieve it. (The axhead was borrowed, you see.)

So here's a question for you: which one was the real prophet?

Easy. Both were. But if we were trying to define "prophet" and all we had were these two men, we wouldn't have a whole lot to go on. All we could say of both men is that, evidently, God spoke to them.

I'm currently teaching a class on the Book of Acts, which revolves around the personalities of two apostles: Peter, then Paul. Peter is a forthright man who has grown into his position as the leader of the church. He can be stern, but he is open to listening to others' new ideas, sometimes to the point of looking a little indecisive. He's proud of his Jewish heritage and, at least in the Book of Acts, prefers to stay in Jerusalem. Paul, on the other hand, is as mercurial as Elijah, determined and sure of himself to the point of being obnoxious, never stays in one place very long, and is much better at starting things than seeing them through. So, which one is the real apostle?

Both, of course. They are men with very different personalities, but both served Christ with all their gifts and despite their weaknesses. We all bring different possibilities to Christ.

This is hardly a new idea, of course, but in this age of factions and quarreling in every area of life, it is worth revisiting. In May – after Anita Henderlight of Africa ELI leads both services on the 4th – I will be preaching a series of sermons on different disciple personalities. Are you a scribe, serving Christ through your mind and education? Or an artist, serving Christ through making imaginative connections and glorifying God with beauty? Is following Christ to you all about worship? Or is it about activity and mission? Are you a counselor? Are you a prophet? And which type is the real disciple?

One more time: they all are. In May, you will have a chance to learn about different personalities of disciples, and – far more importantly – have an opportunity to try them out for yourself. The question is not whether you are a disciple. That's the only reason to be here. The only question is what sort will you be?