

Last Sunday After Epiphany
Cycle B RCL
Revised

2 Kings 2:1-12

In ancient Israel prophecy was a schooled discipline, *i. e.* prophets learned their craft from other prophets. The author of the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings) presents prophets as forming a guild or school. The present story comprises a *succession narrative*, an account of how a student (Elisha) succeeded his teacher (Elijah) as the head of such a prophetic school. (Note that the expression “your master” in 2:3 [Hebrew: *'adoneyxa*] is a way of referring to a teacher.) The narrative makes it clear that the prophet’s role is much more than merely delivering a verbal message. Elisha, like his teacher Elijah, will also have power to perform the wonders that for our author are integral to the prophetic office. The fact that Elijah was taken into heaven, the abode of the divine beings (2:11), led in later Jewish thought to the idea that he would return from heaven at the end of the age..

Psalm 50

This psalm contains a liturgy of prophetic reproof and judgment that does not fit easily into the standard typologies. The categories of wrongdoers are those who do not pay their vows to make public thanksgiving after making public lament (50:14), those who do not call upon the Lord in times of trouble (50:15), and those who attend the public worship of God while ignoring God’s “discipline” (*musar*, 50:17). The psalm reminds the worshipers of a peculiar belief of the Hebrews that their God does not actually eat the flesh of the sacrifices and, therefore, does not need them (50:12-13). This difference from the cults of the nations is the basis for the much later story of Bel and the Dragon in the Greek version of the Book of Daniel.

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Both First and Second Corinthians document a long dispute between Paul and the Christians of Corinth over the Corinthians’ belief that they had already experienced the resurrection and, consequently, were no longer subject either to the powers of this world order or to their moral conventions. Second Corinthians contains fragments of at least four letters Paul wrote in the course of this controversy, and the present passage derives from a large letter fragment (2:14-7:4) some scholars call the *apologia*. Paul builds his argument here that faith in Christ is not a matter of attaining some spiritual knowledge and taking pride in that attainment. Faith, rather, is the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord (*kyrios Christos*), a confession that contrasted with the patriotic pledge *kyrios kaisar*, “Caesar is Lord.”

Mark 9:2-9

Jewish writings about the end of the age (apocalyptic) usually featured some account of the prophet’s ascent into heaven and/or some interchange with heavenly beings. The scene of this revelation is an unnamed “high mountain” (9:2) that reminds us of Moses’ transfiguration on the mountain of Sinai in Exodus 34:29-35. The appearance of Elijah associates Jesus with the prophet who was expected to appear at the end of the age. Moses is the giver of the Law. Thus Mark sees Jesus as continuous with the revelation to Israel in Law and Prophecy and treats him as a figure of the end of this present age.