

Sermon Title: "What if...?"
Rev. Darien Waite
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Scripture: 2 Kings 2: 9, 10, 23-25

9 When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." **10** He responded, "You have asked a hard thing, yet if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." **23** [Elisha] went up from there to Bethel, and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, "Go away, baldhead! Go away, baldhead!" **24** When he turned around and saw them, he cursed them in the name of the Lord. Then two she-bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the boys. **25** From there he went on to Mount Carmel and then returned to Samaria.

Summary

Elijah prepares to pass the torch of leadership to his mentee, Elisha. (v. 9-10). Soon thereafter, Elisha encounters a group of young boys who tease him because he is bald. For context, baldness in that day and time was a "fashion" choice, for a man was judged by his hair. Elisha's baldness might've meant he didn't have the prophetic look. Elisha responds to the teasing by cursing the young boys, after which two female bears mauled the boys to their deaths. This type of scripture causes us to raise difficult questions. For example, does the fact that it is contained in the scripture mean that God was a co-conspirator with Elisha in the death of 42 young boys? Was God on Elisha's side? In trying to make sense of scripture, at times we forget that God has given each of us free will. And, because God does not condone wickedness in high places and always stands on the side of the oppressed, God does not side with the wrong choice that Elisha has made in this passage. Yet the passage provides us with a learning opportunity. We can look into why Elisha made the choices he made as well as ones we make ourselves.

- 1. *EARN THE MANTLE.*** What if Elisha earned the mantle from Elijah which he so coveted. What if Elisha really understood that in order to be the type of prophet Elijah was, he had to understand what Elijah had to endure, even if that meant ignoring the teasing of 42 boys. He saw Elijah's position and power, but what if he also saw the process which came with taking on the mantle?
- 2. *EXPLORE YOUR INSECURITIES.*** Elisha's response to the boys' teasing was a result of his insecurity about his baldness. But what if, instead of measuring himself by others' standards, Elisha had confronted his insecurities, treated his own wounds before it was too late, before his internalized trauma negatively impacted the lives of others?
- 3. *EXAMINE YOUR CONTEXT.*** Elisha has shown a propensity for violence elsewhere in the narrative. His social location as a man in this culture likely modeled for him that acting out violently was the only acceptable way to address feelings of inadequacy, pain and hurt. Patriarchal attitudes about how men

share feelings continue even today. But what if we gave all men space to feel in a healthy manner that does not lead to damaging ourselves and others?

Reflection Questions

1. Describe a time you encountered a scripture that caused you to ask difficult questions of God and/or of yourself.
2. What unexpected difficulties have you encountered when God placed you in a new position? How did you handle the challenges you faced?
3. What insecurities have you faced or might you be facing today that may impact your relationship with God, yourself, and others? How have you or can you address your insecurities in a healthy manner?
4. What cues did you receive from the environment where you grew up about how to express your insecurities, doubts and fears? Which of these messages do you need to shift in a manner that creates healthy space for ourselves and others?
5. How can the church provide space for all people, but especially men, to experience and express the full breadth and depth of emotions?
6. In what ways has Ebenezer helped to begin dismantling patriarchy in the church and the community? What work do we still need to do?