

**Sunday, June 30, 2013**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon – “Opportunities and Obstacles”**

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Wow! Who are these characters that we hear about in today’s scripture readings (2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14 and Luke 8:26-39).

We have Elijah, disappearing in a whirlwind accompanied by chariots of fire;

we have Elisha, donning the mantle, or cloak, of his teacher and able to part the waters of the Jordan;

and we have Legion, a man possessed by demons-running naked through the town square.

Not to mention the poor herd of swine who become hosts to the demons and wind up careening off a cliff into the lake!

What drama! What power!

Each of these stories illustrate two important points:

First: God is more powerful than we can ever imagine or comprehend.

Second: God will appear in our lives in the most unexpected ways at perhaps the most unexpected times.

I’m sure that Elijah did not expect to be transferred from earth to heaven in a chariot, nor did Elisha, who only months before was tending cattle, believe that he would be anointed as a prophet.

Certainly poor Legion had probably given little thought to the idea that he would be rid of his demons and sent to spread the good news of Jesus Christ throughout the countryside.

God comes right into our lives with the power to transform everything – whether we want him to or not.

Our responsibility is to be attentive to God’s work in our lives and to respond to God’s call.

In order to do that, we must pay attention to what is happening – be alert for God’s presence.

Last weekend Joe and I took a hike along the Appalachian Trail from Lion’s Head toward Bear Mountain.

It was a beautiful day and the mountain laurel was in full bloom.

The sun seemed to illuminate the stark white flowers against the lush green foliage, made bountiful from our combination of rain and sun this season.

The streams were all running...it was truly Connecticut woodland at its finest.

We were trying to get to Bear Mountain but had a time constraint because we needed to be back home for an afternoon engagement, so we had to keep checking the time and calculating when we had to turn around and head back.

We didn't make it all the way – the turn around time came before the turn around destination.

On the way back I was thinking about how often we miss the beauty of the journey, because our sights are set on the destination.

Our lives are often structured as a series of destinations....college, jobs, marriage, children, buying a house, retiring.

As we journey toward each of these goals we experience multiple challenges, all contributing to the development of our expectations for both ourselves and those around us.

Our journeys are often a series of opportunities and obstacles.

We meet people along the way that provide us with assistance, insight, and direction, just like Elisha met Elijah.

We also meet people who might try to dissuade us from our goals, undermine our plans or simply try to throw us off the path, like Legion's demons.

One writer noted that "You'll encounter many obstacles along the road to living your dreams.

Some obstacles may be real, some imagined, some may be tangible, and some may be intangible.

Some of those obstacles will be created by others, and some will be self-imposed.

However they manifest, you will always be given the choice as to whether you give them power."

In today's OT reading Elisha is accompanying Elijah on his final journey.

The elder prophet keeps trying to have the younger stay put, but the young disciple insists on accompanying his teacher right to the end.

Elijah's continuing suggestion to Elisha that he remain behind reminds me of people at their deathbeds who insist that their loved ones go home and get some sleep, but the dutiful child or spouse remains wanting to be with the loved one for every last moment.

Often, when the beloved takes their final breath, the survivors cry out in anguish – just as Elisha did.

We have no way of knowing why Elisha wanted to stick with his teacher – but perhaps he was trying to find the words to make his final request.

He asks Elijah for "a double share of his spirit."

These two men have been travelling together for sometime and the younger knows of the immense power that has been wielded by the elder prophet.

Kings have been brought down, armies slaughtered; mayhem has reigned in the unsettled territory of their domain.

So imagine how Elisha must have felt, knowing that he was to inherit this responsibility. No wonder he asked for twice the spirit.

As we journey on our own paths we look to our teachers and mentors, our parents and friends, to help us.

We seek guidance from those who have gone before.

But still, we encounter obstacles. For Joe and I on our hike last week, time was the obstacle.

Obstacles are sometimes pause points, requiring that we rethink our position or current path.

Sometimes, obstacles can be like a guard rail—in place to keep us from going over the edge.

Obstacles on our path sometimes point out a better route that we had not noticed.

Obstacles remind us to trust in God and not only on what our own eyes or ears may report.

One of my daily devotions this week said, “As we journey through life, we are often shackled by metaphorical chains that hold us back, tie us down, or slow our progress. However, we find in God’s abundant love and grace the hope that can free us.”

Behind all of these stories and behind our lives and the world around us, these scripture passages testify to the fact that there is an unseen realm of God that constantly is influencing the course of affairs on our earth.

God is at work, shaping events in our lives, sending forth his power to achieve his purpose on earth.

That power is concentrated in the word that God speaks to us.

That power is present in the people that we meet along our path.

It is a power that transforms lives and heals broken spirits and overcomes the forces of evil and death.

My friends, God is amazing, awe-inspiring, greater than anything our minds can comprehend.

I invite you to choose to love and worship this God, to turn your life over to God’s guidance.

Let God’s holy spirit flow through your body – heart and soul, and transform you so that you might take up the mantle that God has provided and go out into the world proclaiming how much Jesus has done for you.