

## **“Mighty Mantles”**

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts  
February 11, 2024 - Transfiguration Sunday

[2 Kings 2:1-12; Mark 9:2-9](#)

Today is a very big day: It is Super Bowl Sunday, and later today, many of us will be watching the NFL championship game between the San Francisco 49ers and the Kansas City Chiefs. It is sure to be a good game as both teams have been excellent in recent weeks; both are high-quality organizations with exceptional coaching staffs; both have rosters loaded with some of the best players in the whole league, one of whom is dating American royalty in Taylor Swift; and as both teams have elite quarterbacks in the Chief's Patrick Mahomes, who has already proven to the world many times that, although he is a mere mortal, he often comes close to playing like Superman, and the 49ers' Brock Purdy, who was actually the very last player chosen in the NFL draft two years ago but is now a candidate for being awarded the league's Most Valuable Player, has led his team to the heights, and can be hoisting the Lombardi Trophy over his head tonight if his team wins the big game.

Making the day even more super for us is the that this is *Souper*bowl Sunday, and following our service, all are invited to come down to Fellowship Hall to enjoy soups, chowders, and stews while supporting the Community Dinner program. On top of all of this, it is Superb Owl Sunday, and you are encouraged to discover some of the many photos and videos of these feathery, nocturnal hunters posted online to find for yourself a bird to soar up and perch in the loftiest place in your own heart as this year's Superb Owl.

Here in church on this Super Sunday, we are remembering a couple of stories about heroes of our faith that soared to the heights in their own time. Our first lesson from the book of 2 Kings told us about Israel's great prophet Elijah, who lived so closely to God in his earthy life, he did not return his body to earth as the rest of us do at the end of our lives, but was taken up to the sky on a chariot of fire, soaring directly to heaven in a whirlwind. And in our gospel lesson from Mark, we heard the story about how Jesus ascended to the heights of a mountain, where he was transfigured before his three closest disciples, while Elijah and

Moses spoke with him, and God in a divine cloud declared to them all that Jesus was God's beloved son.

Perhaps you've had mountaintop experiences yourself -- moments of glory -- when you radiantly shined or clearly sensed God's blessings shining down upon you from heaven or lifting up your spirit to the heights. Perhaps you've had moments when you felt like the universe was awarding you a championship trophy or naming you as MVP.

Or perhaps you have more commonly experienced life as a mere mortal and have been reminded more often than you'd like of your own human dustiness (and if you need more reminders that you are but dust, you are encouraged to come here to be marked by dust at this week's Ash Wednesday service). You may relate less to Elijah as he soared up to the sky and chatted with Jesus and Moses on the heights, and you may relate more to his protégé Elisha, who watched from below and tore his garments in grief as his beloved mentor left this earth. And you may relate less to Jesus as he shined radiantly on the mountain and more to his befuddled, bumbling disciples.

Yes, we often experience the human stuff of bewilderment and grief more than we feel like superhumans or superstars who have reached life's glorious pinnacle and shine forth from the heights, but the dust that we are made of is actually star stuff, as the great astronomer Carl Sagan reminded us, and the One who formed the stars and the earth calls us to rise up from our mere dustiness to embrace the glorious aspect of our being as God's beloved ones.

Elisha did not rise to the sky with his mentor, but he did pick up Elijah's mighty mantle and was inspired by his teacher and coach throughout his own earthly days of faithfully following Elijah as God's prophet. And we know that Peter, John, and James were transformed by all they experienced in the presence of Jesus and later picked up his mantle of proclaiming and living a message of good news, a calling that has been passed down to us along with billions of others who follow in the gloriously gleaming way of Christ.

We pick up the mantle of Elisha and the mantle of Peter, the mantle of Elijah and the mantle of Jesus, as we continue their work in this dusty world of proclaiming God's glorious word and doing God's transformational, transfiguring work. Where lies run rampant, we speak and stand for truth. Where people are hungry,

we offer food. Where people are harmed by long legacies of injustice, we work for the lofty way of justice to bring wholeness and make true peace.

We carry the gift of world-transforming love, and as we offer this gift, we are changed by it into becoming more of the earth-bound superheroes and earth-made superstars that our loving God calls us to be. So be super today, and let us be super together always. Go, team!