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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
February 11, 2018
Transfiguration Sunday

Scripture Lessons: 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2, Mark 9:-9

Hymns: 359; 135; 719; 54 (244:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 2 Kings 2:1-12a

And it came to pass, when the Lord was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. ²Then Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, please, for the Lord has sent me on to Bethel."

But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So they went down to Bethel.

³Now the sons of the prophets who *were* at Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that the Lord will take away your master from over you today?"

And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent!"

⁴Then Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here, please, for the Lord has sent me on to Jericho."

But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So they came to Jericho.

⁵Now the sons of the prophets who *were* at Jericho came to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the Lord will take away your master from over you today?"

So he answered, "Yes, I know; keep silent!"

⁶Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here, please, for the Lord has sent me on to the Jordan."

But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!" So the two of them went on. ⁷And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood facing *them* at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan. ⁸Now Elijah took his

mantle, rolled *it* up, and struck the water; and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground.

⁹And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, “Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?”

Elisha said, “Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.”

¹⁰So he said, “You have asked a hard thing. *Nevertheless*, if you see me *when I am* taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be *so*.” ¹¹Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire *appeared* with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

¹²And Elisha saw *it*, and he cried out, “My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Transfiguration Sunday

The Transfiguration of Christ is regarded as being of such significance that we designate a special Sunday of observance leading up to lent and the consideration of Jesus’ passion. Jesus’ transfiguration stands out in sharp contrast to what we will be observing in the coming weeks as we consider the depths of Jesus’ humiliation and suffering which Jesus endured as He offered Himself for us as a sacrifice to God. Observing this contrast isn’t simply a matter of observing the contrast. It is a marvelous reminder for us of exactly who Jesus was and is, and the glory that was rightfully His even as Jesus prepared to go forward to the cross.

There is another aspect of this event that we may fail to fully appreciate, that being the presence of Moses and Elijah appearing with Jesus on that mountain top. Not only were they present but we are told that they were visiting with Jesus, speaking to Him of His impending death. We don’t know any more than this about the

content of their conversation. It is however safe to assume that this was an encouragement to Jesus in facing the difficult mission that lay before Him.

Our sermon text this morning picks up the life account of one of these individuals, the Prophet Elijah, as he was about to be received into the glory that awaits us in heaven. It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit would so encourage us to walk in the footsteps of Elijah and secure our hope of glory as Elijah's glory was revealed on the Mount of Transfiguration.

**THEME: Elijah Ascended into Heaven
Knowing the Glory of the Lord.**

What our text reveals in the conclusion of Elijah's earthly sojourn is --

I. The Glory of Life with the Lord.

The Prophet Elijah had spent many years ministering to the people of the Northern kingdom of Israel much of this during the reign of King Ahab and his wicked queen, Jezebel. Many powerful signs had been performed by Elijah in those years, and now the Lord had revealed to him and his students that the time of his departure was at hand. He traveled to Bethel and then to Jericho where "sons of the prophets," his students, were gathered. It was revealed to them, and they reported to Elisha, Elijah's anointed successor, that Elijah was to be taken away from them at this time. This departure was coming as the conclusion of a long ministry of service to the Lord, and Elijah was ready to go and be with the Lord. While there is no book of the Bible attributed to Elijah, the glory of his ministry stands out. He was very bold in testifying to the truth, even if he became discouraged at times.

The Lord wanted the nation of Israel know that Elijah had labored well for Him and endeavored to preserve the truth of God in the midst of an idolatrous people. And so it was that the Elijah was not to pass from the scene quietly.

It was time for the prophet's mantle to be passed on to his successor Elisha. Elisha requested that a double portion of Elijah's spirit be passed on to him. Elisha was not requesting that he be

even greater than Elijah. His request was for an acknowledgment that he was God's choice to succeed Elijah, that he receive the inheritance of the first born, which was a double portion, not in temporal treasures but rather in spiritual treasures. Elisha was acknowledging the honor and glory the Lord had bestowed upon Elijah, his predecessor. In response, he was assured that if he saw Elijah removed from this earth it would be a sign that this spiritual inheritance would be granted him.

The two of them crossed the Jordan on dry ground, Elijah using his cloak or mantle once last time in demonstration of the Lord's power. Then a chariot of fire came down from heaven in a whirlwind and caught up Elijah and took him from this world to be with the Lord. Elijah left this world without passing through death.

For Elijah the glory of life with the Lord was not found in fine houses or great treasures, or prestige among the powerful of this world. Elijah lived a humble life. At times he was on the run, homeless, hiding in the wilderness, living with a price on his head, scoffed at by many people, especially Ahab and Jezebel. The glory that Elijah knew was glory found in the Lord.

We are viewing the end of his life on earth. Perhaps if we were in his position looking back at life we might easily consider life to have been a failure. Considering that Elijah was discouraged at times one might wonder if he looked at life the same way, but his discouragement was not that he lacked earthly treasure or comforts. His discouragement was that so many of his own countrymen had fallen away from the Lord. The Lord had reminded Elijah that the Lord had preserved for Himself seven thousand who had not bowed before Baal. (1Kings 19:18)

It is important for us also to recognize that the glory of this world is not the same as the glory which comes to us in a life with the Lord. Faithfulness to our calling, whatever that calling may be, and following the Lord will bring us blessings the world cannot know.

With Elijah our text records that he did not see death. He is one of only two exceptions in the history of the world of people who did not pass through death. It is tempting to look for merit within

Elijah for this special blessing. It is not found there; it is found in God's grace, which brings --

II. The Glory Connected with Christ.

Elijah's glory was not found in his faithfulness to duty, or in his boldness. It was found simply in his faith. That faith is evident in his name. Elijah means "**my God is the Lord.**" or "**my God is Jehovah.**" Even Elijah's *name* stood as a testimony against the worshipers of Baal throughout Elijah's ministry, but on a personal level it also expressed the source of Elijah's hope for glory. The Lord Jehovah is God's covenant name, the name He used in promising a Savior to come into the world to save us from our sin and to preserve us unto the glory of everlasting life. Elijah placed his faith in God, and the Lord delivered Him out of every trouble, and finally received Elijah to glory. It was all about God's grace that had been bestowed upon Elijah that culminated in this extraordinary demonstration of grace as a testimony to Israel of the prophet's message and reward. It was grace that glorified God.

And yes, it was a grace that characterized more than the end of Elijah's life. When Elijah was received into heaven by means of the whirlwind while riding the chariot of fire, Elisha called out, "**My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen.**" (v.12) it was only Elijah that was riding the chariot, and it was Elijah that Elisha was calling the chariot of Israel and its horsemen. Elijah had been valiant in his faith and life, giving a clear testimony to the truth. In that he serves as an example for us. The Lord has us living here on earth with a heavenly purpose and a spiritual calling. We may not be the chariot of Israel and its horsemen, but Jesus does call us to be "**the salt of the earth,**" "**the light of the world.**" (Matthew 5:13-14) As such we have the much the same role in the world today that Elijah had in Israel. We are to show the glory of the Lord. We are to "**proclaim the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.**" (1 Peter 2:9) We live that others may see us as Elijahs, that they might know that "**my God is the Lord!**" It is to be especially clear that all glory belongs to our Savior, most especially the glory of our salvation.

When we look at Elijah, not only at the time of his translation into heaven but also then as he appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration, we are looking at a preview of –

III. The Glory that Awaits Us.

Jesus' Transfiguration was important for Jesus, for in that day He visited with people already received into heavenly glory because of His merits and sacrifice. It showed Jesus the fruit that would come from His holy life, His sufferings and death and resurrection. But it was also an important event for us. And it was for us that Peter, James, and John were brought there as witnesses, that they might witness Jesus' glory on that holy mountain. They saw and recognized Moses and Elijah, and the glory that the Lord had conveyed to them. They understood better later, after Jesus' resurrection, the assurance of faith that this conveyed to the children of God. In this life we endure tribulations, grief and sadness, but as Paul explained, **“the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”** (Romans 8:18)

For us God's message is clear. The hope of glory is real and certain.

There are those who look at Scripture and see it as a collection of folklore and mythology, and dismiss the events before us today as little more than make believe. The events recorded in Scripture were written for our learning. Peter assures us that the events we observe today in Jesus' transfiguration make the Scriptures even more sure and certain for us. He wrote by inspiration: **“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”** (2 Peter 1:19)

This includes knowing that Elijah was received to glory by the grace and power of God. Moses and Elijah did stand before Jesus on the holy mountain manifesting the glory that Jesus has secured for sinners by His death and resurrection. That is the glory that awaits us. We look forward to that day when Jesus shall come again in glory, whether that be while we still live and breathe, or after we have returned to the earth from which we have been taken. It matters very little, for either way we are the recipients of His

grace, and we shall abide in His glory, and **“we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”** (1 John 3:2)

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.