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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
February 14, 2021
Transfiguration Sunday

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

Hymns: 359; 135; 134; 413:6

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.

⁹ And 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.”

¹⁰ So 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*.” ¹¹ Then 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.

¹² And Elisha saw *it*, and he cried out, “My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!” So he saw him no more. (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: This last Sunday after Epiphany is Transfiguration Sunday. Let’s take a moment to recall what the Epiphany season is all about. It is about seeing how Jesus’ glory was revealed as the Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the world. To that end we have looked at how Jesus’ glory was revealed in calling His disciples, in His teaching, in forgiving sins and healing the paralyzed man. We have been reminded how Jesus’ glory is connected to our salvation.

On this Transfiguration Sunday that continues to be a major focal point of our meditation. Jesus’ glory is revealed not just for the sake of showing His glory, but that we, those who believe in Him, might be assured of eternal glory and everlasting life in heaven.

At the Transfiguration Jesus was seen with two of the prophets of old, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory with Jesus on that holy mountain. We are told that Moses and Elijah and Jesus had a

conversation concerning His impending sufferings and death in Jerusalem. It was because of Jesus' redemptive sacrifice in His sufferings and death that Moses and Elijah had been received into glory. It was not because of their work as prophets, but because of their faith in the promises of God that they were saved, and glorified; promises of God which were about to be fulfilled in Jesus' sufferings and death.

Our text this morning takes us back to the time when the Prophet Elijah was received up into heaven and was thereby received into glory. May the Spirit encourage us on our way to heaven --

**THEME: Following Elijah as the Lord Directs Us
on the Road to Glory.**

Let us begin our meditation considering our --

I. Walking the Path of Faith.

Surely, we understand that Elijah walked the path of faith throughout his life. It was a difficult path to follow. At times Elijah became discouraged because of all the idolatry he saw in his homeland of Israel. It seemed like everyone was chasing after Baal worship instead of worshiping the Lord. Elijah stood out. Even in his name Elijah was a bold testimony of his faith for "Elijah" literally means "My God is the LORD," or "My God is Jehovah!"

Elijah called for repentance in Israel. He was sent to the powerful, to stand before the kings of Israel with messages from the Lord. Wicked King Ahab and his even more wicked wife, Queen Jezebel sought to kill Elijah, but the Lord protected him. The Lord also encouraged Elijah, assuring him that he was not alone; there were still 7000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal, but remained steadfast and true to the Lord. The Lord had directed Elijah to anoint his successor, Elisha, who then accompanied Elijah in his remaining days of ministry until we come to the events set before us in our text.

"When the LORD was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind," (v.1) we are told that the Lord directed Elijah to travel from Gilgal to Bethel. And so Elijah began the final leg of His

journey down the road of faith to eternal glory. Elijah encouraged Elisha to stay behind, but Elisha refused. He went with Elijah as Elijah walked down the road to glory. Once in Bethel Elijah was instructed to go on to Jericho, and from Jericho to continue on to the Jordan River. Again and again Elisha insisted on accompanying his master.

Along the way “sons of the prophets,” or students of Elijah, shared with Elisha the revelation they had received, “*Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?*” (v.3) It was known that the time of Elijah’s departure had come. It was time for Elijah to be received to the glory that awaits all those who believe.

At the Jordan “*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.*” (v.8) It was there that Elisha asked for the blessing, “*Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.*” (v.9) Elijah said if Elisha saw him as he departed this world the Lord would grant him this blessing. They walked on and talked until the Lord intervened.

There is much for us to learn about walking the path of faith. We need to begin with the basic lesson that it is the Lord that directs us on the path of life. It is the Lord that keeps us on the road to glory. We can survey so much of Elijah’s life, and the message will be consistent. The Lord directed Elijah in his walk of life that it might always be that walk of faith that stood as a bold testimony to those around him.

While the Lord came to His prophet with direct revelation concerning where he should go and what he should say, the Lord speaks to us with same authority in His inspired Word. It is good for us to recall the words of the psalmist and take the lesson to heart; “*Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path. I have sworn and confirmed That I will keep Your righteous judgments.*” (Psalm 119:105-106) We are all familiar and have probably memorized some of these words, and they are good for us to remember. As we make our way through this life it is the Word of God that points us down the right path, not our own will or wisdom. It is the Word of God that informs our conscience so that

we stay true to the Lord in our choices of life and remain faithful to our pledge, our baptismal vows that we faithfully serve the Lord all our days. Remember that each day of our lives we are walking down the path of life which the Lord has laid out for us, and it is the road that leads to the same outcome as Elijah's. This is the will of God. We receive the Holy Spirit's gift of confidence of faith as the Apostle Paul wrote of it: "*Be confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*" (Philippians 1:6)

So the lesson we learn from our text is actually following Elisha's example. He saw Elijah's walk of life, and he learned from Elijah's example. He asked to be blessed with a double measure of Elijah's spirit. Elisha desired the boldness and confidence of faith to remain true to his Lord in the face of all the adversity that might come his way as a faithful witness of God's truth. So, we too should pray for such a spirit that we might remain faithful to the Lord all our days. We read in the epistle to the Hebrews: "*Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, **whose faith follow**, considering the outcome of their conduct.*" (Hebrews 13:7) What was the outcome of their conduct that we should follow after such examples as Elijah and Elisha? Nothing less than --

II. Being Received into Heavenly Glory.

Our text reports the wonder of grace Elijah received.

2 Kings 2:11-12 "Then 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.

¹² And Elisha saw *it*, and he cried out, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" So he saw him no more.

We look to Elijah as a hero of faith. His departure from this world with all this world's grief and adversity is probably the best known incident from Elijah's life. He was a hero **of faith**. It was Elijah's **faith** that saw him through the challenges of this life. It was Elijah's **God**, the Lord Jehovah, who is also our Lord and our Redeemer who had called Elijah to faith. It was his God that saw

him through the evil day, and finally, in a great testimony regarding the triumph of faith for those who worship God, Elijah was received directly to the glory of heaven without passing through temporal death. What a powerful message for all those who had wanted to see Elijah dead!

Oh, that sounds wonderful, to enter into glory without passing through temporal death! It is a blessing that those who are alive at the Lord's reappearing shall also enjoy. However, we are told that it is not really a great advantage. Paul wrote, "*If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.*" (1 Thessalonians 4:14) Those who have departed this life are already basking in the glory of Christ and shall come with Him on the Last Day.

By **faith** we are walking on that road that leads to glory, just as Elijah did! That is the sure promise of God and the hope of our salvation. This is the grace of God that abides with us each and every day of our lives, both the good days and the evil days. The Lord is with us and leads us on to glory. The precious words of the psalmist assure us of the glory that awaits us. "*Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, And afterward receive me to glory.*" (Psalm 73:23-24) The Lord is by our side everyday of our lives. **By faith** He holds our right hand just as a father holds the hand of his little child when leading him across a busy street. Our heavenly Father holds the hand of His child; we are His dear children in Christ! He guides us through this life until the day comes that He receives us, each in our day which He has chosen for us, to enter into His glory.

Now, remember today is Transfiguration Day. On this day we rejoice in the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as He was transformed before the eyes of His disciples. They beheld the glory of the Lord! They also beheld Moses and Elijah **in glory** as they conversed with Jesus concerning His decease. What the disciples witnessed that day was amazing for they beheld "*the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14) and they saw in Moses and Elijah the glory that shall be ours. John, who witnessed this transfiguration and the appearance of Moses and Elijah, wrote in his first epistle: "*Beloved, now we are children*

*of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, **we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.** And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” (1 John 3:2-3)*

This is our hope. And we who have this hope in Jesus will purify ourselves from the filth of this world, and we shall follow Elijah’s example as the Lord directs us on the **road to glory!** *“And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”* (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans 15:13)