

**St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church  
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz  
2 Kings 2:9-12a Transfiguration  
February 22, 2009**



When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied. "You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours – otherwise not." As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more.

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

When I was in grade school – one of the most physically powerful men in our congregation cut down trees and dug up stumps. He was exceedingly strong! One day when he was done working – he came home to take a shower – to get all cleaned up. In the shower he slipped – broke through part of the shower door – got a nasty gash in his side. Imagine – you need to go to the doctor – to get some stitches. In the little bit it takes to get dressed – to go to the doctor – you fall again – back onto the jagged shower door. And you lose your life! How sad is that? It all happens so fast! It makes you stop and think – doesn't it? It makes you stop and think:

*Do you know how to die?*

1. Die prepared--your work here finished
2. Die victorious--being escorted to heaven

The part of God's Word we are concentrating on – the end of the ministry of the faithful prophet Elijah. It wasn't easy being a prophet in the days of Elijah. The King of the Northern Kingdom was the wicked King Ahab. God's Word says, "**Ahab, son of Omri did *more evil* in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him.**" Ahab was the best at being bad. Ahab's wife – Queen Jezebel was as wicked as they come. Remember her horrible end – thrown from the tower – the dogs? A nasty end of a murderous wicked woman! Elijah preached God's Word during some of the darkest days of Israel – his duel with the prophets of Baal – his despair under the Broom Tree – his time in the cave – when he heard the still small whisper of the LORD – **Elijah – what are you doing here?** Back to work – preaching God's Word to God's people unafraid – and not discouraged! The LORD who called – also equipped Elijah for his most difficult work.

When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way walking about 7 miles--from Gilgal to Bethel... then about 12 miles to Jericho. They were on the way – to see co-workers – to encourage them – before Elijah would be taken up to Heaven. **The company of the prophets at Jericho went out to Elisha and asked him, 'Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?' "Yes, I know," he replied, "but do not speak of it."** Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." And he replied, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you." **So the two of them walked on.** Everyone knew that Elijah was going to heaven today – but Elisha would not be discouraged.

**Fifty men of the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan. Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground.** Fifty people were watching – when Elijah and Elisha came to the banks of the Jordan River. This is not a huge river – like the mighty Mississippi – or like the Amazon River – at some places 12 city blocks wide. But it is a river – water – flowing from the Sea of Galilee – down to the Dead Sea. It’s water – flowing by – when Elijah rolls up his cloak – his robe – and smacks the river – and it divides – some going north and some going south. There is dry ground ahead of them. In a moment – by a miracle – what had been flowing water – is now dry ground. I don’t mean kind of muddy – kind of slippery – kind of squishy – take your sandals off – and lift up your gown – and feel the mud between your toes. This is dry ground. I would imagine dust kicked up – when they walked across the river – on dry ground. It was a very small thing – for the maker of Heaven and earth – to make a foot path across the river bed. It was an exceedingly small thing – for the one who would sacrifice his Son to redeem us – to move some river water north – some south – so two faithful men of God – could walk to the other side.

**When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?” “Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,” Elisha replied. “You have asked a difficult thing,” Elijah said, “yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours – otherwise not.”** Elijah asked Elisha what blessing he would want. Elisha asked for a double portion – this would be quickly understood by someone Jewish. A double portion went to the firstborn son. In my family that would be me. In our family it would be Matthew. In Linny’s family it would be Jacob. In Dawn’s family it would be Zachary. The first born son – according to the law the LORD gave to Moses would receive a double portion – twice what any other son received. Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah’s spirit. This would be difficult in a couple of ways. It would be difficult – that is impossible for Elijah to give. This would be a gift that only the Holy Spirit could give. If Elisha saw Elijah taken into heaven – the Holy Spirit would give him this gift. It would also be a **“difficult thing”** – it seems to me – in this sense. **To whom much is given – of him shall much be required.** This – I think – falls into the category of praying dangerously – asking for such a powerful spiritual blessing – is to ask for great spiritual responsibility! To be filled with the Holy Spirit – would be like a powerful fire burning within your heart. You would **be compelled to preach the Gospel.** Remember Paul’s words, **“To the weak I became weak to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some!”** When you have Elijah’s spirit in your heart – you cannot rest – but have to share the Gospel all the time – everywhere – every way you possible can! To have the spirit of Elijah is to pray for opportunities and to seize opportunities to tell people about Jesus’ forgiving love. It’s to grow up to be teachers, staff ministers, missionaries and pastors – to dedicate your whole life – to sharing Jesus’ love.

**As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.** It has only happened twice in the history of the world – as far as we can tell from Scripture. God’s Word says, **“When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.”** Genesis 5:21-24 One moment Enoch was here with God – and the next moment – he was in heaven with God. He didn’t have to taste death. Why was that? Was Enoch – so incredibly good through and through that he didn’t earn the wages of sin? That can’t possibly be right. God’s Word says, **“All of us have become like one**

**who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins."**

Isaiah 64:6,7 The best we have—the best we do and say—is like a rag stained with dead blood. Every one of us was sin fatally flawed from the moment of our conception. And all we do—all day long is infected and spoiled by sin. Enoch walked with God—then walked in heaven—because of God's grace. Amazing grace—how sweet the sound—is the only reason any of us will be forever in heaven—God's grace!

**As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.** Suddenly—there was a swirling—a miracle of a chariot and horses of fire appeared between Elijah and Elisha—around and around. Elijah was caught up in these flames—and was taken up into heaven. If you have read your most recent Forward in Christ—the one with Jesus on the cross on the cover—someone wrote in—*anxious about—Elijah in the chariot—or Elijah in the whirlwind by, near, next to the chariot.* There have been painfully many times when as Jesus said—people swallow camels and strain out gnats. Elijah was caught up—in fire that didn't burn him—caught up in a whirlwind—a chariot and horses were there—right there. Where Elijah's feet were—*I could not care less!* The point—the powerful Gospel point—God in grace brought his faithful humble prophet and preacher home! How great is the Great I AM?!

Elisha cried out, **"My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!"** Elijah—his co-worker, his friend, his mentor—his spiritual father—was being carried home! Elijah cried out—**the chariots and horsemen of Israel!** We are spiritually poorer—if we don't know well the Scriptures of 2 Kings. Just 4 chapters after the one we are concentrating on—Elisha and his servant are with their earthly king in the city of Dothan. Under cover of darkness—the Arameans—remember Naaman?—the Arameans—the Syrians—surround the city with their army, with horses and chariots—a strong force. When Elisha's servant got up he saw that they were surrounded and cried out, **"Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are for us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.** 2 Kings 6:15b-17 the chariots and horsemen are the power of the Gospel in the hearts and minds and lives of God's people. Chariots and horsemen of fire are the power of God—against all our enemies—not rogue nations with nuclear missiles—not Russian tanks and fighter jets—not hordes of Chinese soldiers pouring over the border. The danger is spiritual! The danger is from sin and unbelief. And our rescue is the Carpenter from Nazareth who died and rose again to save us.

**And Elisha saw him no more...for now!** When I was in grade school—our principal played the organ for funerals in our Church across the street. On days when there were funerals—the hearse would pull up to church—and the body would be carried in to church. Just about the time the funeral would begin—we—the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders would very quietly file into church and up into the balcony. By the time we got there—the casket would be closed and the family seated. From up in the balcony—we could see the casket—with what looked like this huge amount of flowers on top. We would sing—*What a Friend We Have In Jesus* or *Beautiful Savior* or *I'm But A Stranger Here*—two parts—soprano and alto. We would listen to the sermon. Then—once the casket had been carried out—the family gone to their cars—we would very quietly walk back to school. It wasn't until my best friend's grandpa died—the grandpa who lived with them—had his own bedroom with them—that someone I knew died—and our

family went to his wake. This was the very first time someone I knew died. And it was hard. We drove into Chicago – to a funeral home – where everything was dimly lit – where they played this really wobbly organ music – and everyone talked very quietly. I still remember peeking into the casket – seeing this very old grandpa with powder on the parchment skin of his face. That was – truth be told – kind of scary. But my parents told me very simply – and very plainly – that death was not something I needed to be afraid of at all. That this little grandpa – knew and believed that Jesus had taken away all his sins. That he was in Heaven by Jesus. That except for Enoch and Elijah – everybody dies – unless Jesus comes first. And when we die – we wake up in Heaven. So – if I had any questions they would answer them. But otherwise – rest assured I had nothing to fear from death or dead people. Remember Good Friday. Remember Easter. Don't be scared. Amen!