

Transfiguration Sunday – Year B
Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
2Kings 2:1-12
Pastor Paul Horn

February 22, 2009

Faith

How the Child of God Departs This Life

Sermon note:

Christus Victor – Latin for *Christ the Victorious One*. *Christus Victor* will be the theme for our Sunday morning sermons the next weeks until Easter Sunday. Today is the perfect day to begin our theme because today is Transfiguration Sunday. At the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-9; Luke 9:28-36) Jesus revealed a brief glimpse of his divine glory to the disciples: Peter, James and John. The Old Testament prophets, Moses and Elijah, joined Christ in this heavenly sight. These prophets refreshed the Lord Jesus before He began his march toward Calvary, where he would win the victory over sin, Satan and death.

When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ² Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here; the LORD has sent me to Bethel.”

But Elisha said, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel.

³ The company of the prophets at Bethel came out to Elisha and asked, “Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?”

“Yes, I know,” Elisha replied, “but do not speak of it.”

⁴ Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here, Elisha; the LORD has sent me to Jericho.”

And he replied, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So they went to Jericho.

⁵ The company of the prophets at Jericho went up 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.”

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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. ⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ “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.”

¹¹ 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. ¹² Elisha saw this and cried out, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” And Elisha saw him no more.

Are you ready for the transition? If you've been using rabbit ears or an antenna for your television programming, you were supposed to have purchased and installed a converter box. The radio waves that send the signal to your T.V. are no longer analog but digital. The converter box will transfer the new digital waves to your television in place of the antenna. The transition was to happen this past week, but Congress postponed the move until this summer. However, quite a few television stations around the US decided to make the switch anyway and now some folks are having problems. They didn't listen to the advertisements that this change was taking place. They weren't ready for the transition.

In our story this morning from 2Kings we see the LORD's prophet Elijah make his transition from this life to the next. Just like any child of God, Elijah was ready to go home. Are you ready to go home?

An old saying states that there is nothing certain in this life except death and taxes. Well, a few people through legal and illegal means do escape paying taxes, but we would have to search far and wide to find anyone who departed from this life except through death. In fact, in the whole history of the world only two have passed into eternity without going through temporal death. One was Enoch, the father of Methuselah, who was taken by God directly into heaven (Gen 5:24). The other was the prophet Elijah, whose departure from this earth is recorded in our sermon lesson from 2Kings.

Before we discuss the unique details of his death, let's take a moment to examine Elijah's life. It was not easy being a prophet in the days of Elijah. For the most part his ministry took place during the reign of King Ahab in the northern kingdom of Israel. In 1 Kings 16:30, God himself describes Ahab in this way, "Ahab, son of Omri, did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him." With his evil wife, Jezebel, Ahab led Israel in bringing human sacrifices to the idol Baal. He hired 400 women, designated as "priestesses", to lead Israel in legalized adultery and in the glorification of the putrid idol of love, Ashtoreth. Israel was rotting from within, destroying itself spiritually and morally. Those are the people to whom the LORD sent his prophet.

Now...just imagine that you are employed by a produce distribution company. They send you on a sales call to a remote country where only cannibals live. Your supervisor expects you to make a huge profit selling only vegetables and fruits. The cannibals won't be very interested in your product line, but they may be interested in you for dinner. That's how Elijah felt as the LORD's prophet. How do you preach to these people? At one point in his ministry he felt that he was the only believer in Israel. So depressed was Elijah that he actually told God that he wanted to die (1Kings 19).

Have you ever listened to someone cry, "Why won't the Lord take me home?" The individual with a cancer-ridden body, the 90-year-old in the nursing home, a paralyzed man in his 30s.... cry out like Elijah, "I have had enough, Lord. Take my life." The LORD wasn't ready to grant his servant's request. He still had more work for his prophet to do. Although Elijah was accused of causing trouble by his king, although Elijah felt that he was all alone in his ministry, his powerful ministry of rebuking sin and pointing people to the One true God had been a healthful influence in Israel. Elijah's life had been of service to the Lord. His last hours would be the same.

He went to the 'school of the prophets,' training centers for preachers, kind of like a seminary, in Bethel and Jericho for one last visit. Then he followed the Lord's final instructions to go the Jordan River. At each step of the way Elijah asked Elisha to remain behind, but the younger man answered each time, "As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you." The departure of his spiritual "father" and mentor would grieve him, but Elisha would accompany him to the end. He had been picked to be Elijah's successor and he would be faithful in assisting the Prophet of God to the end. To his faithful companion Elijah said, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" Elijah replied, "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit." Double inheritance was the right of a first-born son, a sign of honor. Correctly Elijah pointed out that such riches were only God's to give. But, if his student saw him leave this earth in the dramatic way that he described, his request would be granted.

Our lesson shows how Elijah was prepared to go home. He continued his life of service to his Lord and Savior until the very last second of his earthly life. Elijah was prepared to go home. Every child of God is ready to go. Although few of us are given advance notice as Elijah was given, it still would make no difference. We will still live a life of service to our Savior. Our Christian living is what keeps us prepared for the transition.

The Apostle Paul put it this way in Philippians 1:21, 'For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.' As a child of God, you live by faith in this world. Faith, created in your hearts at baptism, puts its trust and hope in Christ as the only source of salvation from sin and death. Faith puts its trust and hope in Christ as its only source of comfort and strength. Faith is nourished and sustained by Christ's Word and Sacrament. To live is Christ. As a child of God you live because of Christ and you live for Christ. That means the source of your life is Christ, and the reason you live is to thank Christ for rescuing you from your sins and sin's awful consequence, death. One of the ways you can thank Christ for his saving work is to share him with others....just like Elijah.

The Prophet Elijah was like a lighthouse in a sea of darkness that was the nation of Israel. As children of God you still are shining lights in a sea of evil. Our world hasn't really changed all that much. Today our idols are made of chrome and plastic and green paper. Our own "priestesses" and "priests" of lust are found on-line and in the digital waves that are broadcast into our own homes. Children are, perhaps, not sacrificed to Baal, but to 'convenience' by legalized abortion. But God has given us purpose for being in this world: to proclaim Christ until he summons us home. You proclaim him just by the way you live. You proclaim him by the way you share the comforting Words of Jesus with those who have no hope in sickness, in depression, or in death. To live is Christ, and to die is gain.

To die is gain.... that teaches us something else about how the child of God departs this life. The child of God departs prepared, having lived to serve the Lord. He or she also departs, victorious, being escorted to heavenly glory.

We read, "As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went to heaven in a whirlwind. Today we might be tempted to ask why Elijah did not have to die like the rest of us. Elijah was a sinner as we all are. Sinners deserve to die, as God says, "The wages of sin is death," and "death has come to all people because all have sinned." (Romans 6:23, 5:12) Why was he granted this privilege? There is only one possible answer: purely because of God's undeserved love: his grace. On this side of heaven we will not fully understand. But....perhaps, we too, will have the privilege of

not seeing death before we go to heaven, if the Lord Himself decides to come on the clouds with his angels on the Last Day to escort us to heaven.

Even if that doesn't happen, our departure will be a victorious event. Christ has turned earthly death into the door to heaven. You and I will walk through the door of death only to walk out again into eternal life on the other side of that door. Death has lost its sting. Death will not win the victory. Christ destroyed death by his resurrection from the dead. Christ promises to you, "Whoever believes in Him, (that is Jesus Christ), will not perish, but will have eternal life." (John 3:16) You trust and believe that Christ's death and resurrection is your death and resurrection, is your victory. And so, at your death, your soul will be escorted by the angels to heaven where it will be safe with the Lord until it is reunited with its resurrected body on the Last Day. The believer's departure from this world is a victory, guaranteed by Christ's triumph over the grave.

Peter, James and John saw only a taste of the glory that awaits us when they viewed the transfiguration. According to tradition Peter later met death by crucifixion upside-down. The apostle James was cut down, the Scriptures tell us, by a sword sent by Herod Agrippa. John, seemingly, was able to close his eyes in old age, dying from natural causes. How comforting the transfiguration was for them when their departures came! Each departed in a different manner, but each departed prepared, having lived in faith, and victorious, being escorted to heavenly glory.

So are you ready for the transition? Do you have your converter box yet? Most people these days don't use rabbit ears for television programming, but through cable or a satellite dish. They don't need to worry about the transition from analog to digital. Elijah wasn't worried about the transition from this life to the next. Granted, he didn't have to face death, but he was prepared to go. The LORD made him ready. You and I are ready for the transition. Whether God decides to end this world in our lifetime, or if he determines that our last breath will be used tomorrow, our last day on this earth will be the same as Elijah's, and like all of God's children who have departed before us. Like them, we will depart in Christ, prepared and victorious. Amen.

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Keep in your prayers this week...

All the unchurched who do not know Jesus as their Savior that we may bring them the saving message of Jesus; **National Pastors Godred Ebue Mewanu, Elondo Felix Mokanya, Mesue Isreal Nyabjynem, Hjumbe Daniel Muankume, Akime John Ngalame, and Kemen Renalus Ngalame** or the Lutheran Church of Camaroon and their families; **Pastor Adam Mueller** as he serves Peace Lutheran Church, in and around Kokomo< Indiana; **Larry Hurley, Jared Sundahl, Michael Hefti, George Cushman & Trevis Miller** who are serving in the military overseas; **our members** who continue to invite their friends to our mission congregation to hear God's saving Word; **Sherry Jensen** who is at Pewee Valley; that the Lord will bless our outreach efforts and lead many unchurched people to seek Him at this congregation; **Kathi Hunter and Randy Kitson** who had surgery this past week; **Beth Strommen** friend of the Horn family who is undergoing chemotherapy; those who have not been with us for some time.

Thank you to.... our guests who came to worship the Lord Jesus with us (join us again

soon!); our organist Kay Reynolds; Earl Enevold for constructing a new storage room; all who published the monthly newsletter; and all who served this week.

This Week at Faith...

Today Chili Cook-off
Outreach calls

Tuesday Outreach calls.....6:30pm

Wednesday Women's Bible Study:.....10am
Youth

Catechism.....5:30 pm
Soup/Sandwich supper.....6:15-7pm
Ash Wednesday

Service.....7pm

Friday Small Group Bible Study: @ the
Horn's.....7pm

Saturday Women's Craft Brunch.....9:30am
Small Group Bible Study:
@ Hogan's.....6:30pm

Next Sunday Worship10 am
Sunday School & Bible
Study.....11:20 am

Last week's numbers in response to God's amazing grace...

Sunday worship: 78 Adult Bible Study: 25
Sunday school: 20 Bible Information Class: 2

Serving our Lord next week (Mar 1)

Food: Oakes
Flowers: Grace
Cleaning: Eichbrecht
Acolyte: M. Eichbrecht
Usher/offering counters: R. Poore and M. Eichbrecht

Small group in-home Bible studies

In response to comments made at the *Faith Builds the Future* cottage meetings, the fellowship committee will be offering two in home small group Bible studies Feb 27th & 28th. Pastor & Becky Horn and Pat & Lynne Hogan will be our first hosts. These in home Bible studies are designed to offer spiritual growth and fellowship. Sign up sheets are posted.

Recycle for the Building Fund

Our treasurer has informed us that last year we raised approx. \$500 for the building fund by turning our recycling in to the Fort Knox Recycling Center. Save your newspapers, cardboard (must be flattened), aluminum cans, tin cans and plastic (caps must be off) in separate bags. Jake Stover, Earl Enevold & Brigitte Wells have been taking loads to the recycling center on post. Speak to them for more details.

Wednesday Evening Lenten Worship

Our sermon series this Lenten season will be "Places of the Passion"

Beginning this Wednesday, Feb 25 through April 1st, we will offer a soup/sandwich supper from 6:15-7pm followed by a Lenten Service at 7pm.

The services will be conducted according to the order of service known as *Prayer at the Close of Day*, a version of the historic rite called *Compline*. It is the final service of the day before one retires for the night. The congregation gathers in silence. Preservice music is omitted and the lighting is subdued. This is a time for prayer and meditation. The believer finds peace in God's forgiveness and security under the shadow of his wings.

Women's Craft Brunch

Saturday, Feb 28th

See Becky Tomita for more details 270-351-1396

Usher/offering counter schedule

If you would like to serve our Lord as an usher or offering counter on Sunday mornings, please speak to Earl Enevold. Both men and women are invited to inquire. Training will be offered.

In His Service,

Pastor Paul Horn

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"The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen!" 2Timothy 4:18