

“The cross must come before the glory.”

“My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” (2Kings 2:12) What a high honor to have those words spoken at your departure from this life! Yesterday we remembered the life of someone great – and I’m not talking about Whitney Houston. Yesterday we celebrated the 466 year anniversary of a great man of the Christian Church, Martin Luther. The Lord raised up Martin Luther to be a leader, a teacher, a pastor, a great theologian, a man who stood before the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and before the pope’s representatives from Rome, who had told him to be quiet. He, Martin, stood up for the truth of Scripture when no one else would. Through him, the Lord preserved his Church and the teaching of the gospel. When Luther died a man by the name of Philip Melanchthon, Luther’s colleague and right hand man, was reported as saying, “Dead is the horseman and chariot of Israel who rule the Church in this last age of the world!” Mighty horses and chariots are symbols of a king’s strength. Luther had been a great protector of God’s Church. He had been a symbol of strength. Now he was dead.

It's hard to say good-bye. We don't want to let go. We like to hang on to what is good.

Sounds like Elisha in our text. Elisha had been called by the LORD to be the next prophet after Elijah. He knew what was coming. Elijah wasn't on his deathbed like Luther, but he was leaving just the same. Our lesson tells us (vs1) “... **the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind.**” They both knew it.

Elisha wasn't ready to say goodbye. Just as Melanchthon witnessed Luther do great things, Elisha had seen his master do great things. In the previous chapter of 2Kings you will read a story about Elijah and how he called down fire from heaven which consumed 100 armed soldiers who had surrounded him while he was sitting on the top of a hill. That’s pretty amazing stuff.

Elisha wants the good to continue. It's certainly easier to do ministry when someone like Elijah is with you. Ministry isn't scary – Elijah can call upon God and fire will come down from heaven. It's not out of his comfort zone – Elijah was always so calm and confident about everything. Elisha wants the good to continue. Sounds like a few other guys we heard about this morning. In the Gospel, we heard about the disciples on the mount of transfiguration. Those disciples didn't want the glory to end. “**Lord, it is good for us to be here!** We see your glory, Elijah and Moses are here with you, let’s not let this moment end!” In the same way Elisha wants the good to continue. He didn't even want to talk about the inevitable. (vs3) **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.”**

Sound familiar? Like that talk you need to have with your child who is reaching puberty... you say, “Yes I know, but do not speak of it.” Maybe you have a surgery coming up, or an appointment with your doctor that is inevitable, and you know it, or a loved one doesn't look like he's going to make it or a difficult financial time is ahead or your spouse says, “We need to talk about our marriage,” a parent says to you, “We need to talk about your attitude, your friends, the way you’ve been living.” Maybe you’re a Soldier who has recently redeployed from Afghanistan, and you know the next two months will be the hardest for you as you transition from combat to civilian life, or maybe you are a Soldier with the 3rd Sustainment Command who deploy next month, “I don't want to talk about it.” “I don't want to think about it.” “Leave me alone.” We know difficult times are coming and we may even beg and plead like Peter and Elisha: ‘No, Lord, I am not ready yet.’ Nevermind that God promises to be with us - but that is how we act. Nevermind that we pray, “Your will be done,” but we act like we had just prayed, “My will be done.”

And despite all of our misgivings and protestations and begging and pleading, the moment arrives anyway. Luther died. Elijah left. Jesus went back down the mountain. Our moments of suffering or hardship will arrive, too.

And what advice does the Lord God give to us? Through the Apostle Paul he says, **“We must we go through many hardships before we enter the kingdom of God.”** We must go through many hardships? Why do we have to? Why can't life be good and fun and free from pain? Why can't I just die peacefully in my sleep? Why do I have to face these moments?

What will happen when the moment arrives for you? What should happen? God should forsake you – for your lack of faith and trust in his promises.

But what will happen instead? What happened when Martin Luther died? God raised up others in 16th century Germany to carry the fight and stand firm on the Word of God. What happened when Elijah left? God empowered Elisha to carry on the work. Melanchthon, Elisha and the disciples were all terrified. But once they looked to Jesus, everything was ok. Life was still hard and difficult, but it was going to be ok, because they looked to Jesus. When we have to face these moments we will look to Jesus. He has already taken care of our biggest problem.

Since he was a little boy, Jesus knew that he would have to face some of these moments in his life. The Old Testament Scriptures that he studied in school and listened to in the synagogue spoke about him and mapped out his life –he knew he would be tempted by Satan. He knew he would be rejected by his own people. He knew that his own friend would betray him, and that his own people would mock him and spit on him and beat him. He knew he would be falsely accused even though he would be innocent. He knew the pain of crucifixion would be waiting for him. He knew the grave would be his destiny. He knew all this. He knew that the cross would come.

But he also knew he would heal the sick, raise the dead and command power over Satan and his demons. He knew he would feed the hungry and give sight to the blind and he knew that these people would want to make him their king. He knew he would show his glory to those three disciples on that mountain. He could have stayed in those moments of glory and have to face the cross. But then, he would not and could not be our Savior. Then, we would be stuck in our sins and in hell forever. And so, he sets aside his glory, to take up the cross, and with it, our sins of complaining, and whining and asking why. He sets aside his glory to take up the cross and with it our sins of failing to trust in God, our sins of failing to rejoice and to thank God for our sufferings. Jesus set aside glory so that he might take our suffering and sin and death on himself. The cross must come before glory.

And then the glory came! The glory he revealed to his disciples on the mount he could display without hindrance. And on Easter Sunday morning, after the humiliation of the cross, he burst from his tomb, alive again! Victorious! Over 40 days he showed his disciples proof that he was really alive, eating and drinking with them, teaching them, showing them why the cross must come before the glory. And then he ascended into heaven above the clouds, promising them, “I am with you always. I will come back for you and bring you where I am.”

My friends, like Martin Luther, like Elijah and Elisha, like the disciples of Christ, you, too, will bear the cross of suffering because you follow Jesus. You, too, will have hardships and difficulties in your life because of sin. You know they are coming. But God tells us the cross must come before the glory. He shows us through Jesus

that he has taken care of our biggest problems. He also tells us through this story about Elijah and Elisha that he will help us with whatever he has in store for us.

Before Elijah went to heaven he asked his protégé, (vs9) **“What can I do for you before I leave?”** Elisha replied, **“Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit.”** In other words, “Let me be the sole heir of your ministry and power.” **“If you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours.”** After Elijah was swept away to heaven, Elisha noticed that the outer robe had fallen from the shoulders of his master and dropped to the ground. Elisha picked it up and carried it to the Jordan River. He copied the action he had witnessed his master perform earlier, Elisha struck the water’s edge with Elijah’s cloak, and the water divided to the left and the right, and Elisha walked to the other side of the Jordan River on dry ground. Elisha knew he would be ok. God had provided for his servant. He would not leave him alone.

He knew that in his ministry, the cross would come before the glory – just as it had for his master Elijah. Life wasn’t always good for Elijah. Imagine if the government of the United States murdered all of the Lutheran pastors and you were the only one left? There was a time during his ministry when the king and queen had killed all of the LORD’s prophets and Elijah thought he was the only one left (although God had preserved 7,000 people who still believed in the Savior to come.) The cross had to come first, a time of suffering and struggle and pain. But even through the time of the cross, Elijah was just fine, the LORD preserved him, he kept him in the palm of his hand, under the shadow of his protecting wings, and then the glory came. The LORD took him home to heaven.

Elisha would be fine, too. And the Reformation of the 16th century in Germany did not fail after Luther died – we are living proof of that. God will bless us even in suffering and hardship. He will strengthen us through his Word and through his Holy Supper. He will preserve us in the blessings of our baptism. There in his Word and in his supper and in our baptism he will point us to the cross and to the empty tomb to comfort us that the cross must come first before glory. And then his angels will escort us to heaven where we will live in glory forever and ever. Amen.