

**St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church
Pastor by Pastor A. E. Schultz
February 26, 2017
Last Sunday after Epiphany
Transfiguration WELS Series
B.
2 Kings 2:1-12a**



2 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, "so be quiet." 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, "so be quiet." 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 from 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, it will 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. (12.b Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two.)

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

The book that has a text study on 2 Kings chapter 2 begins, *"Death and taxes, they say, are two certainties. People try to avoid taxes, and a few do. People wish they could avoid dying, but only two people in the history of the world have left this life without dying..."* Just one of the wonderful aspects of being a pastor is – it's our job to visit people who can't come to Church. We visited Marion at Shorehaven in Oconomowoc. One day I went to see her and her hearing aid was hanging on a little string on a safety pin on her shirt. I said, "Marion, your hearing aid is pinned to your shirt!" She said, "I know. I don't know which end is up or down!" I said, "I don't think it matters. Just stick it in your ear!" She did. I said, "Is it working?" She said, "Are you shouting?" I said, "No!" She said, "Then it's working!" Marion lived to be almost 101 years old. But then she died! I love Marion. She is my friend. I will see her again in Heaven! When am I going to die? Where will I die? How will I die? My earthly father turns 90 today. He has broken his neck twice – his ribs twice – his arm and his wrist. He has had a perforated ulcer and bladder cancer – and was in the

Philippines during WW II – the big one. He was in a car accident and thrown from the car into a ditch filled with ice and melting snow – and survived all that! My Grandpas both died in accidents when they were only 42. When will you die? Where and how? Nobody knows. That’s just part of why we come to Church on Sunday – to be ready whenever Jesus sends his holy angels to carry our soul to heaven. This Transfiguration Sunday – the Last Sunday after the Epiphany – the Sunday just before Ash Wednesday we will consider Elijah and the Fiery Chariot that carried him home to Heaven. Today God’s Word encourages us:

Give All Glory To God!

1. By how you live

2. By how you die!

It is tempting, from time to time – to think things are more morally corrupt – that it’s harder to be a believer today than ever. The fact is – it was spiritually and morally horrible in the days of Elijah. Elijah preached God’s Word in the days when the nation of Israel was literally torn in two by a literal civil war. The Kingdom of Judah – the southern kingdom was horrible – the Northern Kingdom – the Kingdom of Israel was even worse! In the north wicked King Ahab and wicked Queen Jezebel ruled. God’s Word says, “**Ahab, son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him.**” 1 Kings 16:30. Jezebel was horrible. Ahab led Israel in bringing human sacrifices to the idol Baal. They also hired 400 women designated as priestesses so that all kinds of people had all kinds of “hugs and kisses” outside of marriage. Families were coming apart all over the place as people went up into the forests on the hillsides for sin so horrible the Apostle Paul would say it would be shameful even to talk about it! There was a moral dry rot in Israel. Elijah preached law and Gospel. He pointed people to the Law that the LORD had given

to his faithful servant Moses. Still the people worshiped fertility cult gods like Baal who promised to send the rain to make their crops grow – promised to give them lots of children to take care of lots of sheep and goats and camels and horses and donkeys. Finally Elijah asked the **people “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.”** But the people said *nothing*. Then Elijah said to them, **“I am the only one of the LORD’s prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets.”** 1 Kings 18:21f The terrible show down would take place on the top of Mount Carmel. The false prophets of Baal went first. They built their altar of stone and put their fire wood on it. They butchered their bull and put the pieces on the altar. Then they prayed to a god that doesn’t exist – to rain down fire – to burn up their sacrifice. Finally Elijah mocked their idolatry. **At noon “Elijah began to taunt them. “Shout louder!” he said. “Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.”** So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday passed and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. **But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.** 1 Kings 18:27-29 Elijah built his altar – 12 stones – one for each of the 12 tribes of Israel, fire wood, cut up slabs of beef. Then he dug a trench around the altar. Then he told the people to fill 4 large jars with water and douse the offering 1,2,3 times – so the water ran off the quarters of beef and filled the trench. Then Elijah prayed to the one true God. **Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”** Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the

sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD, he is God! The LORD – he is God!" Then Elijah captured the 450 prophets of Baal and they were put to death in the valley below. Maybe you knew that part of Bible History.

Do you what happened next? ⁴¹ And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain." ⁴² So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. ⁴³ "Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And he went up and looked. "There is nothing there," he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back." ⁴⁴ The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea." (This after a 3 ½ year drought – so severe – there wasn't even dew on the lawn!) So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'"

⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. The power of the LORD came upon Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel. (Did you hear that? The power of the LORD so filled Elijah by grace alone – he ran literally--faster than the King's chariot all the way home! How amazing is that?)

You might think after such a powerful victory that Elijah would be flying high. But he wasn't. God's Word says, Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them. Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. 1 Kings 19:1,2 Elijah ran and ran until he was far away from Jezebel literally in the middle of nowhere. The word of the

LORD came to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah!” He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too. Elijah came to the entrance of the cave. Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. *A still small voice.* When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then the voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

The LORD would renew Elijah’s courage. The LORD would be his strength. The LORD would give Elijah back-up to finish the work the LORD had called him to do. When Elijah’s work was done God’s Word says, when **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, it will not.”** Again a powerful display of the power of the Great I AM – the Holy One of Israel! To Him alone belongs all glory! **To inherit a double portion of your (Elijah’s) spirit!** What an amazing thing that would be – to have the Holy Spirit fill your ♥ so that it overflows into everything you think and do and say! It is a most precious

blessing by grace alone – when we are blessed by Pastors and Professors – who teach us by their powerful example – and by the sermons they preach and the lessons they teach to love Jesus more and more. Faithful teachers who love Jesus and reflect his patience and goodness in every lesson! Prof. Scharf, Prof. Eickmann – who I visited when he was dying whose last word he spoke to me was *Shalom!* – the ultimate peace that only the crucified and risen Christ can give! Prof. Panning who was always humble and gentle and patient! Dr. Becker who had memorized God’s Word – Prof. Balge who had such a passion for the Gospel, President Valleskey who was also so humble literally walking where Jesus walked. Pastor Mueller who was my teacher when I was a Vicar and so many more! God blesses us with all sorts of Elijah’s. And we are surely blessed when the same Holy Spirit fills our ♥s too!

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. Elijah didn’t die! His Heavenly Father sent a chariot and horses of fire to carry him home! Why? Grace – pure and sweet and simple and giving – God’s “Amazing Grace”! When I was in Northwestern College – I thought the most frightening and terrible thing that could ever happen – was to be with someone the moment they died! 40 years ago I was the vicar. One afternoon I went up to Waukesha Memorial to visit a man named Fred. Fred was in Intensive Care. He had on an oxygen mask. I stepped carefully next to his bed. I read from a small Bible with a blue plastic cover that froze and cracked on the front seat of our car – King James Version. I read to Fred about the Roman

Centurion's servant. We prayed. I took Fred's hand and squeezed it tight! He looked at me and smiled. I looked him in the eyes and squeezed his hand in both of mine. I said, "I will see you later!" I walked out of the ICU and told his family he would be ok and over the loud speaker they said, "Code Blue – Intensive Care!" They were rushing to Fred's side. Jesus kept Fred here – just long enough to hear God's Word one more time – to pray one more time – to hear that Jesus died to wash away his sins one more time! Then he closed his eyes and opened them to see Jesus face to face. God grant us such a blessed end – our soul carried safely home to heaven to say, "Thank you, Jesus!" Amen!

To God alone all glory!

Rev. Anthony P. Schatz