

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMON FOR FEBRUARY 11/12, 2024**

When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah was traveling with Elisha from Gilgal. ² Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, for the Lord has sent me to Bethel."

But Elisha said, "As surely as the Lord lives and as your soul lives, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel.

³ The sons of the prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord is taking your master away from you?"

Then he said, "Yes, I know. Be quiet."

⁴ Then Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here because the Lord has sent me to Jericho."

But he said, "As surely as the Lord lives and as your soul lives, I will not leave you." So they went to Jericho.

⁵ Then the sons of the prophets who were in Jericho approached Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord is taking your master away from you?"

He said, "Yes, I know. Be quiet."

⁶ Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here because the Lord has sent me to the Jordan."

But he said, "As surely as the Lord lives and as your soul lives, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on.

⁷ Then fifty men from the sons of the prophets came and stood and watched them from a distance, while the two of them were standing at the Jordan. ⁸ Elijah took his cloak, folded it together, and struck the water. The water divided to the right and to the left. Then the two of them crossed on dry land.

⁹ When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask me for whatever I can do for you before I am taken from you."

Then Elisha said, "Let there be a double portion of your spirit on me."

¹⁰ He said, "You have asked for a difficult thing. If you see me being taken from you, it will surely be yours. But if not, then it will not."

¹¹ While they were walking and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire came and separated them. So Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. ¹² Elisha was watching and crying out, "My father! My father! Israel's chariot and its charioteers!" Then he did not see him anymore. (2 Kings 2:1-12a EHV)

Two men have never had to face death: Enoch, mentioned in Genesis 5 and Elijah the prophet, whose entrance to heaven is related to us in today's reading from 2 Kings. Nine centuries later, on the mount of Transfiguration, two men appeared with Jesus: Moses and Elijah, Old Testament men in a New Testament setting, representatives of the Law (Moses, Ten Commandments guy) and the Prophets (Elijah, representing all the prophets) standing there with fulfillment of the entire Old Testament, Jesus Christ. It's just one of the **GLIMPSES OF GLORY** our Lord allows us to see today.

There's no mystery about what's going to happen. The narrator tells us in the very first sentence: ***"The Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind."*** (v. 1) Elijah knew it. Elisha, his protégé and successor knew it. It wasn't a matter of IF, but WHEN. How each man dealt with this fact is instructive.

There had been a time when Elijah wanted to die. After he and God showed up the 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel and had them killed, wicked Queen Jezebel spared no effort in trying to kill Elijah. Dejected and discouraged, Elijah felt he was the only believer left and asked to die. God had other plans, however. He saw Elijah through that crisis, comforted him with the knowledge that there were other believers, strengthened him with his Word, and kept him busy proclaiming the Word.

And now, knowing that the Lord would soon take him to heaven, what does Elijah do? Sit back, relax, wait for it to happen? No. He kept on doing the Lord's work, visiting the schools of the prophets at Bethel and Jericho, making sure their theological training was on track, thus making wise use of the time he had left.

Elisha's perspective was different. He was about to lose his spiritual mentor, his beloved teacher. And when Elijah was gone, he, Elisha was to take his place as the Lord's prophet. Not a happy time for him. But his commitment to Elijah and to the ministry of the Word never wavered. Three times at three different places Elijah told Elisha to stay behind, but each time, he replied, ***"As surely as the Lord lives and as your soul lives, I will not leave you."*** (vv. 2,4,6)

That this was a painful time for Elisha is evident by his response to the students in the schools of the prophets. Somehow God had revealed to them that Elijah was about to be taken to heaven. At both Bethel and Jericho, they asked Elisha, ***"Do you know that today the Lord is taking your master away from you?"*** Both times he answered, ***"Yes, I know. Be quiet."*** (vv. 3,5)

That's a natural response. When we know that a loved one may soon leave this life, it hurts, we grieve, even when we know our loved one will soon enjoy the bliss of heaven forever. But we must always remember that for God's people such loss is only temporary. For God's people, it's not a matter of IF, but WHEN. It's not a matter of IF God loves us and will be good to us, it's about WHEN God will show his goodness to us. When it comes to Jesus' second coming, his return on the Last Day, it's not a question of IF he will come again, but WHEN. The Bible makes it clear that, unlike Elijah, we will all die. It's not a question of IF we will die, but only WHEN we will die. And beyond that, it's not a question of IF we will receive eternal life, it's only a question of WHEN we will enter heaven's glory.

Elijah's dividing the waters of the Jordan River with his robe brings to mind Moses' parting of the Red Sea. After they'd crossed over, Elijah finally speaks of his impending departure, ***"Ask me for whatever I can do for you before I am taken from you."*** Humbly, Elisha asks to inherit ***"a double portion of your spirit"*** (v. 9) which meant that as the heir to Elijah's ministry, he wanted the Holy Spirit to make him as faithful a prophet as Elijah had been. Elijah couldn't grant this request himself, but left it up to the Lord. Subsequent events show that Elisha did receive this blessing.

Finally, ***"While they were walking and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire came and separated them. So Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind."*** (v. 11) Elisha saw this and cried out, ***"My father! My father! Israel's chariot and its charioteers!"*** Then he did not see him anymore. (v. 12)

What are we to make of Elisha's statement, ***"Israel's chariot and its charioteers!"*** Was he simply informing Elijah that his heavenly Uber had arrived and be sure not to miss it? Elijah knew. He saw. He went up to heaven in the whirlwind, escorted by the fiery chariot and horses. The phrase, ***"Israel's chariot and its charioteers!"*** was spoken in reference to Elijah rather than to the fiery chariot and horses.

In those days a nation's strength was embodied by its army, an important component of which were chariots and horsemen, who protected and saved a country from its enemies. Elisha called Elijah ***"Israel's chariot and its charioteers!"*** because the Lord had enabled him to be Israel's spiritual strength and defense against the self-destruction and ruin that sin and unbelief bring. The same thing was said of Elisha at his own death when Jehoash king of Israel wept over him and said, ***"My father! My father! Israel's chariot and its charioteers!"*** (2 Kings 13:14) These two prophets had been Israel's spiritual hope and strength during a time of spiritual rot and decay.

Let's leave that glimpse of glory behind and head for a moment to the Mount of Transfiguration. There Jesus appeared briefly in all his glory, talking with Moses and Elijah, men long gone from this earth And there's this: ***"There he was transfigured in front of them. His clothes became radiant, dazzling white, whiter than anyone on earth could bleach them."*** (vv. 2b-3) Matthew tells us that Jesus' face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. The Greek word for transfiguration give us the English word "metamorphosis." We use that word to describe the change that takes place when a caterpillar becomes a

butterfly. There is a drastic difference in appearance between a caterpillar and a butterfly. But that change pales in comparison to the change in our Savior's appearance as he stood on that mountain.

It's just a brief glimpse, yet we can see so much. At first glance, he is a human being, a man. But behind the human nature is something else: divine glory. Jesus is God – from all eternity, but lately he'd set aside full use of his divine power and glory. His human nature masked and concealed the divine.

This is no computer-generated metamorphosis; the Father's voice declares: ***"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him."*** (v. 7b) God's Son, meaning he is true God! Nor is this a hallucination or the sun reflecting off of snowcapped mountains. Peter was there and spoke of this experience three decades later: ***"For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty... We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain."*** (2 Peter 1:16,18) John witnessed this event too: ***"The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."*** (John 1:14) Paul's summary in Colossians 2:9 says so much in so few words: ***"All the fullness of God's being dwells bodily in Christ."*** Jesus is God!

As mentioned earlier, also appearing in this brief glimpse of glory are Moses and Elijah. Moses received the Law/the Ten Commandments. Elijah is one of Israel's greatest prophets, representative of all the prophets. The two of them are talking with Jesus. What about? Luke's Gospel tells us that they weren't talking about the weather or the Super Bowl or the over/under on how many times the cameras will show Taylor Swift. Luke reports they ***"were talking about his departure,"*** (Luke 9:31) literally, "exodus."

We've spoken of Elijah already. How fitting that Moses was there – he'd led the exodus of Old Testament Israel out of slavery in Egypt. Jesus was about to complete the journey that would free the world from the slavery of sin's guilt and power.

There is much sin and evil in the world – we see it in the news, around the world, around the country, in our own area, all around us and within us. But just how bad are your sins, really? Let's see: You vs. a murderer or a child abuser or someone who defrauds others of thousands of dollars.... You're a saint compared to so many. But that's only a glimpse, a glance at the outside. Get more than a glimpse, stop confessing everyone else's sins, and let's see our sins as God sees them. Sin, whether small or great, secret or spectacular, is a big deal. Sin separates us from God, kills, condemns.

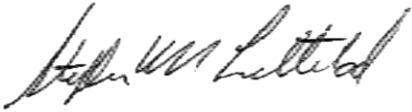
Know what sin really looks like? A holy, sinless God wrapped in human flesh hung up to die a painful, naked death in humiliation and shame. That's what your sin looks like; mine too.

An awful sight, but a healing sight! Jesus died that we might live, lives so we'll never die, so we can live forever. On both mountaintops - the mount of transfiguration and Mount Calvary – we get glimpses of who Jesus is and what he does. Get more than a glimpse. Follow the Father's advice: ***"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him."*** (v. 7b) See that he is the Savior of the world; repent and believe. Don't just get a glimpse once in a while; gaze upon him, fix your eyes on Jesus, cling to him as if your life depends on him. It does! Listen to him.

So, we're listening right now. This is good. And, maybe we'll listen again on Wednesday – Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. And maybe next Sunday – Wow, three times in 8 days. Why not every day? That's a bit much, isn't it?

Nope, not when we realize that today you and I are ***"Israel's chariot and its charioteers."*** In this age of increasing spiritual apostasy, continuing moral decline and relentless assaults on the truth of God's Word, God has made you and me the spiritual strength and defense of our nation, of our communities, of our church, and of our families. We are the salt of the earth. We are the light of the world. We are soldiers of the cross. We are to give answers for the hope that we have. This is not a task for the weak and faint, but God enables you to be strong through his Almighty Word and Gospel-powered Sacraments.

Time in the Word equips us to be ***“Israel’s chariot and its charioteers”*** the spiritual stronghold God wants us to be. The more time we spend in the Word, the more the Spirit can equip us to be men and women of God who ***“pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness... (people who) fight the good fight of faith.”*** (1 Timothy 6:11-12a). In truth, the more time all of us spend in the Word, the more often Satan will have to turn tail and run, at least for a while. Through Word and Sacrament, keep getting those glimpses of glory until one day, you will enter into glory, and the glory of God is all you will ever see for eternity.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Stephen W. Luchterhand". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Pastor Stephen Luchterhand
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