

Transfiguration: 2/11/18
St. Paul: Luxemburg, WI
Text: 2 Kings 2:1-12
Theme: Never Alone

I remember a group of former students talking one day about what pastors do. I got the impression that they didn't think very much. I mentioned that there is quite a bit of time that goes into sermon preparation. The one student said, "You mean you have to write your own sermons. I thought you just got those out of a book." Another student replied, "Are you serious? Have you ever listened to him? You can't get that stuff out of a book." I'm still not sure how I should take that comment.

That story called to mind for me another story. The story is told of a popular preacher. His sermons were much loved, but the preacher was a bit of a fraud. All of his sermons were written by a staff assistant. Finally, the staff assistant's patience ran out with the preacher. One day the preacher was standing in the pulpit before hundreds of expectant listeners. The staff assistant had handed him his sermon right as he headed into the pulpit. He got to the one sentence that read, "Now, this my friends, takes us to the heart of the Book of Habakkuk." The preacher then turned to the next page. The only words written on the next page were, "You're on your own now."

We understand how unsettling those words are. That's why parents find it so traumatic on the first day of school, right? Have you ever watched parents drop off their kids on the first day of school? It's nerve wracking. Why? That's because there's fear that their child might feel that he or she is all alone. Why are parents so bothered by that? Because they've had that feeling in their own lives, right? When's the last time that you felt all alone. Years ago, when I was a vicar, my supervisor left me at the end of my time. He went off to Alaska on a mission trip. This was back in the days before cell phones and things. Right after he left, a single mother in the congregation was killed in a tragic car accident. My supervisor's wife tried to make contact with my supervisor, but wasn't able to. I don't remember her exact words when she called me but the message was basically, "You're on your own." When's the last time you spoke those words to yourself?

You're on your own now. That's exactly what Elisha felt in our Old Testament reading on the day when Elisha was taken up to heaven. That's exactly what the disciples felt like when Jesus ascended into heaven, and that's certainly what the disciples were afraid of there in our Gospel reading on the Mountain of Transfiguration. Jesus was telling them that He was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die for the sins of the world. The disciples didn't get at this point that Jesus needed to do this

in order to save them and all people. They only heard that Jesus was going to be going away. They didn't want to hear the words "You're on your own now."

We see that Elisha doesn't want to hear it either, does he? We see what happens on the day when Elijah is going to be taken up into heaven. Let's not forget just how important Elijah had been to a lot of people, especially Elisha. This is the individual that Elisha has been following around. Elisha really hasn't had to make any decisions in his life. He has never had to wonder what to do in any situation. Elijah is the one who has made the decisions. Elisha has just been the intern to this point. He has had the comfort of knowing that no matter what situation he has faced that Elijah would be there to help him out. It was the same for the disciples. They had just followed Jesus around for the last three years. They have certainly faced many stressful situations, but Jesus has always known what to do. Jesus has solved every problem. When they didn't have food for supper, Jesus just multiplied bread and fish and fed thousands of people. When lepers called out that they needed to be cured from an incurable disease, Jesus just touched them and made them better. When they didn't have money to pay their taxes, Jesus sent Peter out to catch a fish that just happened to have the right amount of money in its mouth to pay the tax bill.

Now, Elijah is about to be taken away. People keep coming up to Elisha and telling him that Elijah is going to be taken away that very day. How does Elijah respond? He says, "Yes, I know it; keep quiet." What do the disciples do on the mountain of Transfiguration when they're being given the message that Jesus is going to be going to Jerusalem to suffer and die for their sins? Peter tells Jesus that it's good for them to be there. He tells Jesus that he can build three shelters for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. In other words, what Peter is saying is, "I don't want to hear this." I don't want to see you suffer and die. Let's stay up on this mountain and spare me from the fear that I will be left on my own.

I don't want to hear it! We say that too, don't we? It isn't just parents saying that at times to their kids when their kids are determined to give them news they don't want to hear. There are plenty of times when we want to go into denial. I think of how many times over the years that I have seen people get negative news from their doctor, and they choose to ignore it. I have even been in rooms with a person who has been told by their doctor that their situation is terminal. Everyone knows that the person is going to die, but they don't want to hear it. They want try to pretend that it's not going to happen. It's just like the old seventies song by Badfinger,

before Mariah Carey ruined it: "I can't live if living is without you."

But we see that these denials don't work. It wouldn't work for Elisha. Elijah was going to be taken away from him. Elijah had to go so that he could be delivered from the pain and suffering of this world and taken to heaven. It wouldn't work for the disciples. Jesus was going to have to go to Jerusalem and suffer for the sins of the world. Jesus had to go so that He could rise and overcome death for us that we might be able to deal with the pain of separation. It doesn't work for us either. We live in a fallen world, and we will feel the pain of separation in this world.

Elijah knows that he is going to be taken away from Elisha. He asked Elisha what he can do for him before he is taken away. Elijah tells Elisha that he is going to be taken away from him that very day and that Elisha will now have to take up the mantle of the prophet. How does Elisha respond? He says, "Make it a double!" Now, that's a response that many people might give at receiving such news, right? I suppose we might think as we look at the situation that is facing Elisha that maybe he could use a double shot of whiskey. But Elisha is not asking for a double shot of spirits. Elisha is asking for a double shot of the Spirit. You see Elisha is feeling that he may not be up to this. He is looking at the prospect of having to take

Elijah's placing and carrying on without Elisha, and he is feeling inadequate to the task. When's the last time that you were in a situation in life where you felt inadequate to the task? Sometimes, it can just be life's challenges that cause us to think, "Make it a double." Often times, it is the feeling that we are all alone. People look at the prospect of having to carry on without a parent, a spouse, or someone else and feel inadequate to the task.

Well, we see that God gives Elijah a double shot of the Spirit. God would give Elisha a double shot of the Spirit so that he could take up the mantle of the prophet. Elisha would be given the strength that he needed to deal with the loss of Elijah and all of the challenges that were now before him. We see that it would be the same for the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration as well. They were seeing Jesus' glory before He went to Jerusalem to suffer and die. Transfiguration Sunday is all about Jesus showing His glory before He goes to the cross. He was giving His disciples a glimpse of His glory to prepare them for what was ahead. But they would also be given a double shot of the Spirit. What does the voice from heaven say to the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration? "This is my beloved Son; listen to Him." You see the disciples were being told that it would be through the Word of God that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on them.

Make it a double! We have the assurance that we too have been given a double shot of the Spirit. Those same words are spoken to us: listen to Him! There are plenty of times in our lives when we feel all alone. Those words, "You're on your own" are words that we feel in our lives all of the time. We frequently feel that we are on our own. However, God pours out His Holy Spirit on us. We are told that it is in through our hearing of the Word of God that we receive a double portion of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to us in that Word of God and gives us the assurance that we are not alone and never will be alone.

We see that Elijah would be taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot. This is where we get the old song, "Swing low sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home." The words talk about the comfort that the believer has in knowing that death is simply a matter of God coming and taking us home, just as He did Elijah. Elijah was one of only two people that didn't die but was taken up directly into heaven. We also see what Elisha says when he sees this. He cries out, "My father, my father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" We can just picture Elisha watching this scene and crying out those words. "My father, my father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" But what do those words mean? You see Israel had trusted in war horses and chariots to protect itself from its enemies. But the real enemy that the

nation faced was itself. They faced destruction from a rejection of the true God, worship of self, and their own immorality. You see what Elisha is pointing out is that it was not King Ahab's horses and war chariots that had protected the nation. It was Elijah who fearlessly proclaimed God's Word to the people and called on them to repent. He was the nation's defense from its real enemies. By being a beacon of light, he had defended the nation.

You are the chariots and horsemen of America. Our nations real enemies are not North Korea, ISIS, or anything else. Our nations real enemies are spiritual forces. Our nation faces destruction from a rejection of the true God, worship of self, and all manner of immorality. Those who have faith in Jesus as their savior serve as beacons of light in our world. You give witness to Jesus and proclaim a message of repentance. You serve to protect the nation from its real enemies.

We see that Elijah shows up again after he leaves Elisha in our Old Testament reading. He shows up in our Gospel reading on the Mount of Transfiguration. Do you remember the story of Elijah back in First Kings chapter nineteen? Queen Jezebel threatened his life. She said she was going to have him killed. We remember that Elijah laid down and cried out to God. He said that he wanted to die. He said that he was the only one left. He was convinced that he was the only believer left in the

world. He was convinced that he was all alone. God came to him and made it clear to him that it wasn't true. We see here on the Mountain of Transfiguration that he's not alone at all. He is with Jesus. It is certainly easy for us to feel that we are all alone in this world, but God comes to us and tells us it's not true. Jesus shows His glory at the Transfiguration. He would go down off that mountain and go to Mount Calvary and pay for our sins. He would rise and overcome all things for us that we might have the assurance that He is always present with us. Like Elijah, through faith in Jesus, we have the assurance that we will live forever. Like Elijah, we are given a double shot of the Spirit through our hearing of God's Word on this day. We are given the assurance that we are never on our own. Amen!!!