

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: At the Crossroads Between Life and Death

Lesson: 2 Kings 2:1-12

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. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two.

(Slide 1) Today is the last Sunday after Epiphany. It is also called Transfiguration Sunday. Christmas is the day when Jesus was born. It is the day God came to this earth. Epiphany celebrates the start of Jesus' ministry. It's known as the season of light and season of hope, as Jesus begins his journey as the Savior who brings light to a dark world. In the Orthodox Church, Epiphany is seen as the real Christmas and its season is celebrated as such.

On Transfiguration Sunday, the story of Jesus taking Peter, James, and John up a high mountain, where he was transfigured before them, is emphasized

carefully and intentionally because it indicates that Jesus is the Son of God. Transfiguration Sunday is the climax of Epiphany.

When Jesus was transfigured before his three disciples, Elijah and Moses appeared beside him, and a cloud covered them, from which a voice said, “This is my Son, whom I love.” Peter was amazed by this experience and wished it could last forever. Maybe it made him feel closer to God and gave him a sense of what lay ahead.

While reading those verses, I wondered why Elijah and Moses were there with Jesus among all the Bible characters. I thought about it and realized Elijah and Moses have something in common: they both went up Mount Horeb and spent 40 days getting messages from God. That mountain is like a special spot where people receive important messages and see what God wants them to do.

(Slide 2) ⁸ *At Horeb you aroused the Lord’s wrath so that he was angry enough to destroy you. ⁹ When I went up on the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that the Lord had made with you, I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I ate no bread and drank no water. (Deuteronomy 9:8-9) – Moses*

(Slide 3) ⁸ *So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. (1 Kings 19:8) - Elijah*

Like Moses and Elijah, Jesus also went up a high mountain with his disciples and transfigured before them. The voice of God from the cloud directly indicated that Jesus was the Son of God. This also signified the prophecy that Jesus would rise from the dead.

Another thing Elijah, Moses, and Jesus have in common is that they all showed the path to life at critical moments between life and death.

(Slide 4) Moses was taking his people away from Egypt, and Egyptian soldiers were chasing them. Suddenly, they reached the Red Sea, blocking their way. The Israelites felt trapped looking at the wide sea in front of them. They didn’t think they could swim across it. They stood at a crossroads

between life and death at the Red Sea. Moses prayed, and God instructed him to stretch out his hand with his staff over the sea. When Moses did as God said, the sea divided, and the people walked through on dry land.

Friends, Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior, and the Christ. He is the gold of our lives and our king. In the beginning, God created the world and made humans. Humans originally lived happily with God. But tempted by the snake, we began to disobey God's word. This broke the perfect relationship between God and us. We should remember, living with God, following God's word, leads to life, but living selfishly, disobeying God's word, leads to death.

As we drifted from God, our lives became filled with worry, anxiety, fear, despair, distrust, and hopelessness. Until Jesus came to us, our lives were dark and devoid of hope. But Jesus, who brightly illuminates our lives, came to us, took our sins upon himself, and died in our place. And it didn't end there; he rose again and continues to live with us even now. He's still with us. When we all stood at the crossroads of life and death, Jesus guided us onto the path of life through his bright light, fixing our relationship with God.

(Slide 5) In 2 Kings chapter 2, Elijah and Elisha were walking together. Elijah told Elisha, "Stay here; the Lord has sent me to Bethel." But Elisha said he wouldn't leave Elijah. Elijah said it two more times, but each time, Elisha always said he'd never leave him.

When Elijah said "stay here" to Elisha, he actually meant something deeper. He wanted to test if Elisha was truly committed, so he told him to stay put instead of following him. So, Elijah's words really meant, "Are you sure you want to come with me?" "Are you ready to be my follower?" Elijah asking Elisha to stay here three times was a process of confirming Elisha's determination.

Elijah, Elisha, and the fifty men, who followed them, known as the company of the prophets, stood at the edge of the Jordan River. The river blocked their path. Then, Elijah took off his cloak, rolled it up, and struck the water with it. And then, the water parted, letting them cross the river on dry ground.

Like Moses, Elijah also relied on God's word to divide and break through obstacles that hindered his life.

And Elijah asked Elisha if he had any requests. Elisha responded that he wished to receive a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Then, soon after, God took Elijah up to heaven.

Elisha was deeply saddened because he knew he wouldn't see Elijah again. Then, he took Elijah's fallen cloak, returned to the Jordan River, struck the water with it, and, just as Elijah had done, the river parted, revealing dry ground. This showed that Elijah's ability had been passed on to Elisha.

(Slide 6) Friends, living with God brings life, but turning away from Him leads to death. Peter's amazing experience with Jesus on the high mountain wasn't just about showing Jesus as God's Son. It is an invitation for us to cross over from a dark world without hope to a world filled with hopeful light through Jesus.

As Christians, what we should do is not just to gaze at Jesus, who is the light, from afar. Rather, we are the people who continually walk towards Jesus, aiming to become a little more like Jesus, and to draw closer to Him, while keeping our eyes fixed on the light, Jesus. Transfiguration Sunday invites us to be the people of light and people of hope, walking towards Jesus, belonging to Him, trusting His words, and guiding those still in darkness to the world of light and hope.

Coming to church every Sunday morning is very important and meaningful spiritually, but we shouldn't just stop there; keep walking towards Jesus. All of you are already doing great, but please don't stay where you are in your current state of faith, and keep walking towards Jesus. So, when someone is feeling lost and discouraged at the crossroads of life and death, I hope we can show them the light and hope Jesus has given us. Amen.