

14 June 2017
Commemoration of Elisha

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Greenspring Village, Springfield, VA

Jesu Juva

“My God is Salvation”

Text: 2 Kings 2:1-15a; Luke 24:36-53; Psalm 139:1-12

Losing someone is hard. Someone you've relied on and who has been there for you - maybe for a long time - suddenly isn't there any longer. That's a difficult and life-changing thing.

Today we heard when Elijah left Elisha. Elisha knew this separation was coming. Sons of prophets after sons of prophets told him, but he didn't want to talk about it. He probably didn't even want to think about it. You know how that goes. Ignore it, and maybe it won't happen after all.

But happen it did. The chariots and horsemen of Israel came and separated the two, and a whirlwind took Elijah up into heaven. And then Elisha was alone. His prophet-father was gone, the chariots and horsemen of Israel were gone - there was just a sudden, deafening silence . . . and all those sons of the prophets on the other side of the river looking at him.

But there was something else - the cloak that Elijah had been wearing fell off of him and was lying on the ground next to Elisha. It was perhaps the same cloak that Elijah had put over Elisha's shoulders when he called him to be his assistant all those years ago. Maybe just then, Elisha remembered that day that had changed his life. He had taken the yoke of oxen he had been plowing with and sacrificed them. He took the wooden yoke and used it for the fire to roast the oxen (1 Kings 19:19-21). He had given up everything. And now, what?

But though he seemed utterly alone, he was not alone. Rolling up the cloak just as Elijah had done and striking the waters of the Jordan just as Elijah had done, the water parted for him just as it had for Elijah. And the sons of the prophets said: ***The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.*** Not quite. Elijah was not with Elisha, God was. The Spirit of God that had rested on Elijah was now with Elisha, and would be with him from now on. Elijah was gone, but Elisha had received something, someone, even better.

It is much like what happened with the disciples. Jesus had called them from their work, too. While Peter, James, and John were fishing, while Matthew was collecting taxes, Jesus called them to new work. They gave up everything and followed Him (Matthew 19:27). For three years they listened to His teaching, they watched His mercy and compassion, they saw His miracles. Then He was taken away from them. Not by the chariots and horsemen of Israel, but by a Roman cross. They felt Elisha's sadness and aloneness. When Jesus came back, when He rose from the dead, there was joy, but then He was

gone again - He ascended into heaven. But before He did, Jesus made them a promise: ***that they would be clothed with power from on high***. Or perhaps we could say it this way: they would be cloaked with power from on high; with Jesus' cloak that would fall from Him. Not a literal piece of clothing - they would receive His Spirit. And not just ***a double portion***, but the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

And that indeed is what happened. Just as Elisha saw Elijah taken up, so the disciples saw Jesus taken up. And perhaps that story of Elijah and Elisha is one of the Scriptures from ***Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms*** that Jesus opened up for them and helped them understand. That it wasn't just a cool story, but a story that pointed forward to Him and what was now happening; what was now being fulfilled. That this is how they should think, and the Spirit that they should expect. That would explain why after Jesus left they were not sad, but ***returned to Jerusalem with great joy***. They knew they were about to receive something, someone, even better. And that gift was given, the fullness of the Holy Spirit poured out on them ten days later on the day of Pentecost.

And that is the gift, that is the power, that you too have received. When you were baptized. That was your personal Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was (literally!) poured on you through water and the Word. You were clothed, or cloaked, with Christ and His Spirit and with the promise that you would now never be alone. For as Jesus also said when He ascended: *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age* (Matthew 28:20).

And so He is. People in this world come and go. Jobs, new opportunities, and infirmities can cause separation. Sin can cause hurt and bitterness that can divide us from those we were close to. Death robs us of those we love. But none of those things, and indeed, *nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 8:39). Or as the psalmist penned:

*Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me* (Psalm 139:7-10).

Our sins cannot separate us from Christ - He joined us here in this sinful world, took our sins upon Himself and atoned for them. We are forgiven. Death and the grave cannot separate us - He went there, too, and shattered them. He faced satan in the wilderness and won. Even in your darkest days and darkest moments . . . the psalmist said this too:

even the darkness is not dark to you;

*the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you* (Psalm 139:12).

So while there may be times when you feel alone and abandoned, Elisha, the disciples, and the Word of God teach us it is not so. You have been cloaked with Christ, you have received His Spirit, your sins are forgiven, you are a child of God. And one day, it will not be the chariots and horsemen of Israel coming for you, but Christ and His angels, to take you up with them, and with Elijah, Elisha, the twelve, and countless others who have gone before us, to live in the unveiled presence of Christ forever.

Until that day, we are Elishas, for his name means: *my God is salvation*. That is your confidence each day, your hope at all times, and your joy no matter what comes upon you in this life. *My God is salvation*. And He is your God, and you are His child. For the Spirit of Christ rests on you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.