

Rev. Dan Welch Transfiguration 2-11-24 Text- 2 Kings 2: 1-12

Elijah the prophet did amazing things. He lived about 850 years before Jesus was born. Not much is known of his early life. He arrived on the scene, calling Israel to return to the Lord in repentance and to turn away from worshipping an idol called Baal. He prophesied for 15 years or so and then was gone. (A portrait type picture of Elijah.)

But during his ministry he did amazing things. We heard about something amazing in the Old Testament reading. Elijah and Elisha came to the Jordan River. Elijah took off his cloak and struck the water. The water spread apart, and the two of them crossed on a dry river bed. Amazing.

Earlier in his ministry the region had been going through a severe drought. Food was scarce, especially for the poor. Elijah met a widow who had a young son. The mother and boy had enough flour and oil for one more meal. Then they would starve. Elijah came up and asked the woman to make him a meal. She did. What happened next was amazing. The flour and oil did not run out. Day after day they had enough to eat. It was like that old commercial of the Energizer Bunny. The flour and oil kept going and going and going so they would survive the drought. (Picture of Elijah with the widow and a boy)

Then the widow's son died unexpectedly. The widow accused Elijah of bringing much grief into her life. What happened next was amazing. Elijah took the boy to an upper room and stretched out over him. Three times he pleaded with the Lord to give the boy's life back. The Lord did! The boy started to breathe again. Elijah had done an amazing miracle, and the widow believed that Elijah was indeed a man sent from God.

Another time Elijah was sent to challenge the king of Israel—Ahab—who had married a woman named Jezebel. Jezebel had brought hundreds of false prophets into Israel to lead the people to worship Baal. She was a powerful and vengeful queen. In order to call the people back to the Lord, Elijah challenged 850 false prophets to a contest. (Picture of Elijah challenging the false prophets) An altar was built and the terms were simple: call down fire from above to destroy the sacrifice on the altar. The false prophets danced and prayed to their gods and cut themselves for hours. Nothing happened. Elijah even threw in some teasing and jeers. Then Elijah had the altar soaked with water. He prayed. What happened next was amazing. The true God of Israel burned everything—flames engulfed the sacrifice, altar and water. It was obvious who the true Lord was and who the people were to follow and worship.

Then the time came for Elijah to hand off his prophetic duties to Elisha. He was to be taken up from this world, and once again how this happened was

amazing. After a day of traveling from place to place, the time came. Elijah and Elisha were standing together when a fiery chariot and horses came out of the sky. (Picture of the fiery chariot) We're not sure just how it happened, but Elijah was scooped up and taken away. Read carefully what happened and you realize Elijah did not die. He was one of two people in the Bible who did not go through death when they left this world. He was just taken up in the fiery chariot to be with the Lord. Amazing.

Elijah did amazing things, and that's why he seems so strange and far away from us and our lives. It's hard to relate to someone who is so different and distant from people who live rather uneventful lives like we do. More than 2900 years separate us. His life was filled with eye popping, miraculous moments of God's power and glory. We live pretty uneventful lives.

Most days are just routine. If you have children, the days are filled with driving to school, trying to get everyone to where they need to be on time. We have lots more to eat than that widow did, but somehow it turns out to be fast food in the car or a quick microwave meal because we're so tired. No Energizer Bunny to keep us going.

Or if you have an empty nest, the days seem to run together. It's the same old things each day. Eat, clean, TV, run a couple errands. Do it again and again and again. Elijah sure lived an eventful life, but our days are so much same old, same old.

Oh, we do have those moments when something out of the ordinary happens. A trip to see the grandkids. A concert. Winning a championship game. A nice night out just the two of you. A planned vacation. A surprise party. It's exciting for a while, but then it's back to the routines once again. The eventful moments seem to fly by and become a memory so quick, while Elijah's big moments are remembered for 2900 years.

Elijah—amazing. You and me—uneventful.

Except . . . for all the amazing things Elijah did, he was more like you and me than we may realize. When you look behind the miracles to see Elijah the person, you find someone who is lonely and afraid. (Picture of Elijah by himself and hiding) Are you surprised? You would think seeing what all God did through him, that he would be incredibly strong and confident. But he had his moments. Much of his time he was alone. One time he was so down that he believed he was the only person who still believed in the true God. Now that's lonely. And after that great victory over the false prophets, what does Elijah do? He finds out that Queen Jezebel is hopping mad and wants him dead. So he runs for his life. He's scared and hides.

Even this great man of God had his moments of weakness, times when he was filled with doubts. Now that I can identify with, and so can you.

I remember a cartoon I saw a few years ago. It was a school picnic for a bunch of teenagers. Kids are all around. In the center is a young girl. She's talking on the phone. She says, "I'm so glad you called. I was so lonely." In the midst of all those classmates, she was lonely. How close and real that loneliness is for each one of us. We're busy and so connected with phones, text messages, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook and emails, yet deep inside we long for close relationships that would take away the loneliness. So many people with so many ways to keep in touch; yet so few **close** relationships, so much loneliness.

And we're afraid of so many things. What do you fear? A disaster that takes away your home and things. A death of someone you love. The loss of your mind with dementia. A broken relationship. Crime violating your home or your body. Financial setbacks. The loss of your relationship with the Lord due to some sinful weakness in your life or growing doubts about Him. Elijah feared for his life, and so do we. Elijah the person is not so distant and strange after all.

Now jump ahead some 900 years. Jesus is on a small mountain with Peter, James and John. What happens next is amazing. Jesus suddenly changes. (Picture of the Transfiguration, one with Moses and Elijah standing beside Jesus) Dazzling white, unbelievably bright, He is transfigured right before the disciples' eyes. They get a glimpse of Jesus's glory. And who is there with Jesus? Moses and Elijah. Elijah is back, and he's talking with Jesus. But Elijah is not the center of attention here. Jesus is. The Father speaks: "This is my Son Whom I love. Listen to him." Then Elijah disappears and only Jesus is left.

But that focus of attention should not surprise us. It was the same focus when Elijah was a prophet long ago. He did all those amazing things, not to be the center of attention, but to turn the people's attention to the true God. He called the people back in his day to worship the Lord and Him only, and on that Mount of Transfiguration he does something similar for us. Before Elijah disappears, he calls us to see, to listen to, to turn to, to believe in, to worship, to follow only Jesus. What does he do? It seems so simple and uneventful. It doesn't look all that amazing. Elijah was simply standing next to Jesus. He was merely talking with Jesus.

But what were they talking about? When Jesus was transfigured, what were they talking about? Amazing things. Not Elijah's amazing things, but about the amazing things Jesus would do in Jerusalem. You see, when Jesus

comes down from this mountain, He heads into Jerusalem to do amazing things for you and me. (Picture of Jerusalem with a cross in the picture)

Jesus is alone when He does these things. Oh sure, His disciples are there with Him, for a while. But in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prays and they fall asleep. He is arrested and they run away. He will go to the cross alone so that we will never be alone. On that cross, He bears all our loneliness, all our fears. The old familiar hymn has it right. What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear.

Beneath the cross of Jesus, something amazing happens. Our fears and loneliness, our sins and griefs, our moments of weaknesses are given to Jesus, and He takes them as His own. (Jesus on the cross)

Then, as if that were not amazing enough, something more happens in Jerusalem. Jesus reappears in glory. The tomb is empty and Jesus is alive, never to leave us. In a way, we're much like Elijah. He stood next to Jesus and talked to Him. Jesus, risen from the dead, is always standing next to us, ready to listen when we talk with Him. (A picture of Jesus, resurrected, and standing next to someone in contemporary dress is the final picture)

Yes, He is standing next to us in the uneventful, everyday moments of life. He's there with us during the errands we run, when we drive through the fast food place and when we collapse exhausted in bed at night. He's standing with us when we have a same old, same old day or when something exciting has happened. But most of all, He's standing with us when the loneliness makes us doubt. He's there when the fears come rushing in.

Think about Elijah. Even though Elijah did some amazing things, I'm sure he would tell us that the most amazing thing of all was standing next to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, talking to Him about going to Jerusalem, going to the cross, and rising from the dead. Elijah would not want the focus on himself, as if he were someone amazing. No, Elijah would want us to focus on Jesus because today and every day Jesus is standing beside us. In resurrection glory, Jesus never leaves us or forsakes us. He is always ready to talk to us. And that is an amazing thing indeed! Amen.