

Dear friends in our Savior,

“Lord, if you wanted to take me today, I’d be ok with that.” Have you had days like this? You are weary and tired from the problems and challenges that just don’t seem to stop coming. You are burdened with the sins that you have tried to fight against but just can’t seem to overcome. You were fine trying to juggle and balance everything that was thrown at you, but the last one just broke you. Perhaps you felt so burdened and overwhelmed that you were a bit more forceful in your request of God, “Lord, I’m done. I’m giving up. Take me now!” I’m not talking here about serious thoughts of suicide, though certainly it would apply, but just that overloaded, overburdened feeling of being tired of this world and certain of the next. I’m talking about those moments when you stop and ask yourself, “How do I keep on going?” It’s those moments when you start feeling sorry for yourself and start to think that you’ve got it worse than anyone else in the rest of history. It’s those times when you start thinking that no one in history has to face the things that we have to face today. What you need is strength to keep on going. You need someone, something to lift you up, give you something to look forward towards and keep moving forward.

It’s a careless and dangerous generalization to say that our world today is more corrupt than the world has ever been and that it’s tougher to live as a child of God today than ever before. A study of Elijah’s life would suggest otherwise. As we have the opportunity today to study the end of Elijah’ life, we note the strength that he was given to face the extreme challenges to his faith and life. We see the strength provided by God himself that helped Elijah to keep on going in the face of very difficult times. That’s what this Day of Transfiguration is all about. It gives us a glimpse of the glory of God and the future triumph and glory that awaits all of God’s people to give us strength to face the life before us as we strive to carry out the work of God. We are reminded of the future glory that will follow our present suffering. That’s what **Keeps Us Going!**

**2 Kings 2:1-12** *Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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, “but do not speak of it.” <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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, “but do not speak of it.” <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Fifty men of the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> “You have asked a difficult thing,” Elijah said, “yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise not.” <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> Elisha saw this and cried out, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” And Elisha saw him no more.*

God’s people have always needed strength to face the challenges of life. In our gospel lesson for today, the disciples needed strength for what they were about to go through. They were about to watch their teacher be betrayed, beaten horribly, suffer terribly and eventually die. A glimpse of Jesus’ glory provided that strength to know that even though Jesus seemed to be defeated, he wasn’t. Jesus himself needed strengthening on that mountain. His meeting with Moses and Elijah was to talk about his upcoming work, his suffering and death. They offered Jesus strength to move forward and continue on his mission to offer himself for the sins of all people.

And in our text, we hear of Elisha asking for strength—a double portion of it. Elisha had already been picked and anointed by God to be Elijah’s successor. He had seen what Elijah had gone through in his ministry and knew that he would need the strength. Elisha’s words when Elijah was taken into heaven, “*My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!*” speak to the strength Elijah had. He had been seen as the embodiment of strength in Israel. Elijah ministered in Israel during a time of intense apostasy. The king was Ahab, of whom the Bible said did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of the kings before him. Ahab led Israel in bringing human sacrifices to the idol, Baal. Israel was rotting from within and was destroying itself spiritually and morally. Elijah faced real danger to his life in preaching against the sin and idolatry of Ahab and Israel. Perhaps the most familiar account of Elijah is his challenge to Ahab and Baal on Mt. Carmel to see whose God had the power to help them. Both erected altars and prayed for their God to help them. The prophets of Baal prayed all day, even cutting themselves to evoke a response in Baal. But nothing happened. After Elijah had saturated his altar with water, he prayed to the Lord and the Lord sent a fire that was so hot that it consumed not only the sacrifice, but all of the stones of the

altar as well. But rather than bringing Ahab and Israel closer to the Lord, it only made them more solid in their determination to get rid of Elijah.

Standing up to wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel took its toll even on Elijah. After seeing his numerous warnings to the king and queen go unheeded, after they had tried to kill him for speaking out against their wickedness, Elijah was ready to give up. He sat under a tree and sulked, playing the victim that everyone was against, thinking that he was the only believer left on this earth. He told God to take his life. God's answer was, "No. I've got more work for you to do." God sent Elijah back to preach not only against the wickedness of the king and queen, but against the whole nation of Israel. And he did this with great strength and boldness, even against great opposition and troubles.

Today, we see Elijah's journey of life finally come to a glorious end. The Lord who had given him the tasks he was to do, who gave him the courage and boldness to complete those tasks, was finally delivering his servant from the church militant to the church triumphant. And God did that in a glorious way. Elijah was one of only 2 people in all of history to go heaven without facing death. We are encouraged in our walk of faith to see the glory that God has waiting for his people when their life of suffering and challenges is over.

We have many days like Elijah, where we are ready to throw our hands up and say, "Lord, I'm giving up. Take me now!" Yet to each of us, the Lord has said, "No, I still have work for you to do." While the rest of Israel was falling into those immoral ungodly ways, Elijah did not conform to those ungodly ways. We can say the same for our society around us today. Our idols are not the wood and stone carved images as then. Rather ours today are made of chrome, steel and green paper. We fight the immoral attitudes about sex portrayed in magazines and on TV. People today, rather than asking, "How can I serve God and others with my gifts" ask, "How can I use God and others to serve me?" With our church body putting out a statement this week, we are reminded that at times we too have to stand up against the government when they mandate things that go against God's command, like mandating abortion inducing drugs in health insurance plans. Sin is sin, whether it is society or the government promoting it. And in Elijah, we are reminded that sin is not some light case of spiritual measles, but is like cancer of the bone marrow for which death is imminent.

And we get wearisome in this battle against sin. We fight and fight against these sinful attitudes in our society and yet find ourselves being influenced anyway. We struggle against specific sins that plague each one of us and find ourselves falling prey to this sin. We try so hard to control ourselves, but in a moment of weakness fall into that same sin. We get tired of saying no to the things of this world and of standing up for what God says in his word. We face such ridicule for some of the more difficult truths of scripture we start to feel all alone in our stand on God's Word. We get so lost in the challenges of today, that we fail to lift our heads to see the glory that awaits.

Imagine Elisha facing the fact that he was going to inherit this dangerous and difficult job from Elijah. He showed an absolutely undying commitment to the ministry. Despite the opportunities to abandon Elijah, he stayed with him right up to the end and asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. He asked for a liberal and abundant share of the spiritual gifts that would make him a real heir of Elijah's prophetic spirit. To strengthen him for his ministry, he gave Elisha a chance to see something that no one else has been able to see—the glorious way in which the angels of the almighty gather the saints to eternal glory. As he faced the challenges that he would face ministering for the Lord over the next half a century, he would be able to very vividly remember the glory of God awaiting him for standing firm and continuing with God's work.

That triumphant escort of Elijah to heaven that we see today comforts us who are still here on this earth and are waiting our escort to glory. That's what Transfiguration Sunday is all about. God gives to us a glimpse of the glory that is waiting for his people to strengthen us as we continue in the work of our Lord. That is the glory we see in the magnificent way Elijah was taken to heaven. That is the glory that we saw as Jesus spoke with Moses and Elijah up on the mountain. That's the glory of God that we see in the work of Jesus as he came down from that mountain and continued on his mission for our sins. That's the glory of God that provided forgiveness for our lack of trust in God to take care of us as we faced the challenges of this world. That's the glory that provides forgiveness for us for the times that we have given up on God or turned to the idols in our world today. That's the glory that restores us even though we have let down in our vigilance and given into the ungodly influences in our society today. The God whom we worship holds all the power and glory in the universe. Not only does he provide forgiveness for your sins and eternal salvation, he has the power to protect us and keep us strong in our faith no matter what we face on this earth, and has his glory waiting for us when life on this earth is over.

That's what keeps us going! Marvel at the glory of God that he gives us the privilege to glimpse today in the readings of scripture. Take comfort from the faithfulness of God to his prophets Elijah and Elisha and know that he has promised the same to us. As we come down from this mountain of glory today, like Elisha and like Jesus himself, let's set out with determination, strength and courage to go after the work that God has given us to do. He has never promised us that life as his people will be easy. In fact, what he has promised is that we will face many challenges and hardships before we enter the kingdom of God. But the same Lord has promised his strength to keep on going. Today, he lays before us the glory that awaits. Stand firm amidst the challenges of this world. Stand tall on the promises of God. Look forward to the glory that awaits. As God's people, **Keep on Going.** Amen.