

KEEP YOUR EYE ON GOD'S GLORY
TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

2 KG 2:1-12
FEB 15, 2015

¹ Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ² And Elijah said to Elisha, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. ³ And the sons of the prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?" And he said, "Yes, I know it; keep quiet."

⁴ Elijah said to him, "Elisha, please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. ⁵ The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know it; keep quiet."

⁶ Then Elijah said to him, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. ⁷ Fifty men of the sons of the prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. ⁸ Then Elijah took his cloak and rolled it up and struck the water, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry ground.

⁹ When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me." ¹⁰ And he said, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so."

¹¹ And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. ¹² And Elisha saw it and he cried, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

You may remember a year or two ago, there was amazing sight
one of largest, most unusual flowers in world bloomed
right nearby, in St. Peter, at Gustavus Adolphus college,
But I didn't see it, most of you didn't either
because it happened so fast.

Flower only blooms every 7-10 years, for only one day.
If you are not paying careful attention, you miss it.
Text tells about an even more amazing and glorious sight,
Elijah being taken to heaven without dying
Elisha saw it but only because he was very faithful
in not taking his eyes off of Elijah.
and as a result he received a blessing from God.

Today, Gospel reading tells of sight still more amazing,
revelation of Jesus' glory in transfiguration
which was seen by only three of his disciples.
Like other disciples, we have not seen the Transfiguration
and yet we can receive a blessing from it
when we keep our attention on Jesus
in whom is seen the true glory and presence of God.

ISRAEL SAW GOD'S GLORY BUT LOOKED AWAY
GOD'S PEOPLE KEEP WATCHING TO SEE GOD'S GLORY
WE SEE GOD'S GLORY BY LOOKING TO JESUS

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So what is point of this long, rambling introduction?

Considering that Gilgal, where they started, is right close
to the Jordan river where they eventually crossed it,
what is the point of Elijah's rambling trip?

It is almost like driving around trying to lose one tailing,

Or like long introduction to magic trick
in order to distract the one watching.
But if you pay attention and look closely you can see
it is tour of places reminding how God revealing faithfulness
& how Israel took eye off the ball in blind unfaithfulness.
Gilgal, where they started, was a historic starting point,
where Israel first camped after entering the promised land,
became place of worship, where Saul anointed first king.
But it was also place Saul was to worship God
before going to fight Philistines but got tired of waiting
for Samuel to come so offered sacrifice himself.
This impatient disobedience led him to be rejected as king.
Next stop, Bethel, was even older place of worship,
Abraham worshiped there, Jacob saw heaven opened there.
Israel worshiped God there.
But when part of Israel broke away under king Jereboam,
he set up worship of a golden calf idol there
to distract people from worship in Jerusalem.
Jericho was where God gave Israel first great victory
but one of them, Achan was distracted by gold he saw
& disobeyed God by taking what God claimed for himself
which led to disaster and defeat for Israel.
Jordan river where water divided so they could cross over
was where Israel crossed on dry land into promised land
and set of pile of stones in middle of river
as constant reminder of what God had done for them.
That was after Moses, who had led Israel
was taken from them on the other side of the Jordan
and passed leadership on to his successor, Joshua
Now again miraculous gateway of Israel into promised land
was gateway for Elijah to leave for greater promised land
while passing leadership on to his successor.
But this route raises this question, not only
will Elisha continue to follow faithfully in Elijah's footsteps
not just now but after seeing his glorious departure,
but will Israel, which had seen God's glorious presence
with them in so many ways faithfully follow him.
or would they be distracted and look away from him.
Which, of course, raises even more important question for us.
Will we who have been brought through miraculous gateway
of water of baptism wander away from it?

Will we who have God come down to us here
to be miraculously present in Holy Communion
faithfully keep coming back to it?
or will we be distracted by many forms of shiny golden things
all around us & impatiently to do our own thing instead?

GOD'S PEOPLE KEEP WATCHING TO SEE GOD'S GLORY

⁹ When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me." ¹⁰ And he said, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so."

Somehow, Elisha seemed to have known already
that if he was going to get what he wanted
he had to keep his eyes on Elijah, God's representative.
He did know that Elijah was going to be leaving this world
When it is apparent one is about to die, those closest
to them often wait with determination beside them.
What Elisha wanted was to receive Elijah's inheritance
as the one closest to him.

The rule in Israel was when a man died, oldest son got double
share of inheritance, 2ce as much as the others.

Elisha wanted this double portion,
not of any of Elijah's earthly possessions but of his spirit,
which, of course was the Holy Spirit.

So, what he wanted was not really from Elijah himself
but from God who was the source.

and what he was keeping his eye on was not just Elijah
but what God himself was doing.

and what he ended up seeing was God's own glory.

In those days, God revealed himself through his prophets.

How does God reveal himself today?

He has given us words of prophets & apostles
written down in the Bible.

We don't have to wander around following one man,
we can have his word in every home.

How can we have any excuse not to keep our eyes on it?

In original Hebrew, words for "double portion" are curious idiom,
literally: two mouths. God has given us two mouths.

Not only speaking mouth through which we get God's word

But also double blessing of an eating mouth
through which we can receive true presence of God
in Holy Communion to strengthen our faith.

And whenever we receive God's word & Holy Communion,
we are also receiving his Holy Spirit, working through them
to give us the blessings of faith, forgiveness, peace,
strength to resist temptation, hope of eternal life.
all because, in paying careful attention to these things,

WE SEE GOD'S GLORY BY LOOKING TO JESUS

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What's this about chariots of Israel and its horsemen?

He is not talking about chariots of fire he has just seen.

In those days, the strength of nations defense depended on
how many chariots and horsemen it had.

Elisha sees and recognizes what is really defending Israel
from enemies is Elijah and his prayers for them.

Elijah often pictured as being carried to heaven in fiery chariot.

Actually, as v. 1 also says, he was taken up by whirlwind,
like being sucked up by a tornado.

Chariots of fire are common image of powerful presence of God
sometimes described as having wheels that stir whirlwind.

Point is that God himself is powerfully at work here.

It is God himself, not just Elijah who is the chariots of Israel.

Elijah himself was a man who fell short.

He didn't actually finish assignments God gave him to do.

It was Elijah who took up his mantle to finish them
but his ultimate successor who finished job was not Elisha
but Jesus himself.

Elijah did not die. He was not done yet. As Malachi prophesied,
he would return before the great day of Lord's deliverance.

This is why he shows up at Jesus' transfiguration with Moses.

Moses was the great lawgiver, but he died without
truly keeping the law, as did his successor, Joshua.

Elijah was the great prophet, but he was taken
before prophecies are proved true, as successor Elisha.

They both hand things over to Jesus to totally finish.
At his departure he does not leave anything undone.
By his perfect life he has kept the whole law
in the place of all of us who also fail to do it all,
and who may know how often we fail to do
even what we intend and try to do.
When was lifted up not by whirlwind but cross & died
it was finished. He had paid for all our sins
and broken power of devil to tempt & accuse us.
As Elijah left, he threw back his cloak which parted Jordan,
and Elisha who ripped his own clothes, put it on.
When we too, figuratively rip our clothes in grief over sin,
we receive and wear, instead of our filthy rags,
the righteousness of Christ which he gives us.
This is why we can now look up and cry "My Father, My Father"
to God himself, who is not separated from us
but is constantly with us, never taking his eyes off us.
This is why we keep our eyes on him
and his glory which is revealed in Jesus.
Not being distracted by either the glories or the gloom
of the other things around us.

ISRAEL SAW GOD'S GLORY BUT LOOKED AWAY

Even in the many places that reminded of what God did,
they lost focus on him and so lost his blessing.

GOD'S PEOPLE KEEP WATCHING TO SEE GOD'S GLORY

Elisha, who kept his eye on Elijah saw glory of God himself
and received from God himself as spiritual inheritance.

We receive this same spiritual inheritance by persistently
focusing our attention on God's word & sacraments.

WE SEE GOD'S GLORY BY LOOKING TO JESUS

Elijah himself did not finish what God have him to do
nor do any of us,
but like him we met with Jesus in worship to talk about
how Jesus fully finishes God's work in for us
so that we can have not just a passing glimpse of his glory
but be taken up to heaven ourselves to be with him.