

Sermon: The Transfiguration of Our Lord (6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany)

Text: 2 Kings 2:1-12 (v. 11).

Theme: How can you too go up to heaven?

Goal: That the hearers would grow in hope and faith

Dear Friends,

Introduction: They are only two people (as far as we know and as it was revealed to us) who didn't experience death: Enoch and Elijah.

About Enoch is written: "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away" (Genesis 5:24). And about Elijah we heard in the Old Testament reading for today. - Is there any chance for any of us not to experience death and go straight to heaven as well? There is! ... (I see some question marks on your foreheads...)

The Transfiguration of Our Lord shows us an open window in the sky and we can have a glimpse of the glory of God and what can happen to us too. It is not by chance that Elijah appeared with Moses talking to Jesus on the Transfiguration Mountain. His life and his ministry encourage us to follow his paths till we will be taken to heaven as well.

I – Elijah

Elijah hadn't had an easy ministry. He was called by God to preach to a generation who was going astray from the true God, following the false god Baal. The King Ahab had married Jezebel, a foreign princess, who gave all support to the worship of her foreign god Baal, persecuting Prophet Elijah and the followers of the true God. After several confrontations with the King and with the false prophets, Elijah became so discouraged that he asked God: "I have done enough, Lord. Take my life!... The Israelites have rejected your covenant... I am the only one left..." (1 Kings 19:4,10). But God answered him: "I reserved seven thousand in Israel – all whose knees have not

bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him” (1 Kings 19:18).

Elijah’s mission always had been to call people to repentance and to present them that only the true God could save them. Therefore John the Baptist is compared to Elijah, because their ministry and the situations they faced were very similar.

After a long, faithful ministry, God revealed him that he would be taken from the living. It seems that God gave this revelation to some groups of prophets – people who Elijah was teaching and preparing for the ministry. Before being taken, Elijah visited the three sites where he had these groups of prophets: Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho. It seems that he was giving the final guidance to them and introducing Elisha as his successor.

Finally, just before he was taken up to heaven, he asked his successor: “Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?” – This concern of the old prophet touched me a lot and I will come back to it at the end of the sermon: “what can I do for you?”

And Elijah was taken up to heaven in a marvellous way! A chariot and horses of fire appeared and Elijah went up to heaven! Elisha was an eyewitness of what had happened! And he gave continuity to the ministry of Elijah.

Elijah appeared more than 800 years after this event talking to Jesus and to Moses on the Transfiguration Mountain. This shows that all the time he had been with God in His glory, together with Moses and all other faithful departed. - Our faith and our hope in not in vain! God’s promises about a future life are true indeed! – Peter wanted to perpetuate that glory; but it was necessary for Jesus to stay for a little while on this earth to accomplish all God’s plan, opening the heaven to all through His death and resurrection!

## II – Christ

God allowed the three disciples to look for a while into the glory of heaven and to see what was awaiting them and all who walk with the Lord, like Enoch, Moses, Elijah and many others. The glory of God shown on the Mountain was to improve the hope of the disciples and to strengthen them for the days to come: The suffering and death of Jesus. There is a bigger hope and a heavenly reality after the suffering of this life. Jesus went down the Transfiguration Mountain to face the deepest darkness and suffering of this world and to climb the Calvary hill. But after everything had passed, he climbed a higher mountain, the Ascension Mountain, to be taken back to heaven, where he *sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty* and from where He will come back to take us with Him to heaven.

Paul's words are clear about the future of the believers: “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep (die), but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet... Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” <sup>(1</sup>

Corinthians 15:51,57). And: When “the Lord himself will come down from heaven... the dead in Christ will raise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore, encourage each other with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17). – Remember my first question: Is there any chance for any of us not to experience death and go straight to heaven as well? There is! ... in case we are alive walking with the Lord when Jesus returns! Be ready for this big surprise, always walking with the Lord! He will not fail in His promises!

Conclusion: I want to return to the concern I raised before: The question of the old prophet, wanting to do something more for his

friend in his last minutes on the earth, touched me when I was studying the text: “Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?” – Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah’s spirit.

We pray and sing every Sunday: “Create in me a clear heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence. And take not Your Holy Spirit from me.” This is taken from Psalm 51, David’s prayer when he confessed his sins to God. We pray for God’s Spirit as Elisha did. And God gave us His Holy Spirit when we were baptized and He is giving us His Holy Spirit every time we hear His Word and receive the Holy Body and the Holy Blood of Jesus in the Lord’s Supper.

“What can I do for you before I am taken from you?” – Nobody knows his last day. I don’t know how long I will stay with you, if one year, or two or three. “What can I do for you before I am taken from you?” Time is always short and our end comes when God calls us. We have our AGM next Sunday and plans will be discussed for this year and for the future of St. Thomas. Let me know what more can be done to firm your faith in Jesus and to receive a rich measure of the Holy Spirit. What more can be done for your beloved ones to bring them to the fellowship of the Christian Church and to the true faith and hope. What more can be done together to serve our community and to show God’s love to others. What more can be done for our children... - It sometimes burdens me when I hear Jesus saying to His disciples: “So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say: We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty” (Luke 17:10). – But I trust in God’s mercy that He blesses the work of our weak hands. And I pray that He gives me and you double portion of His Holy Spirit to believe and to live a life “walking with the Lord” till we will be taken to heaven. Amen.