

## **God of Transition**

Relational God: Part 4 “God of Transition”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – February 12, 2023

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

**Readings:** 2 Kings 2:1-14; John 1:6-9, 19-21

**Reflection:** Psalm 44

**Greeting:** The Lord is merciful and compassionate. The Lord is very patient, and full of faithful love. The Lord is good to everyone and everything. God’s compassion extends to all his handiwork! (*Psalm 145:8-9*)

**Prayer:** Lord, our guide and our guardian, we pray that you will shelter us and lead us as we join together today in worship. May we remember the wonders of your creation each and every day. May we remember that we are a people of your great promise. May we recall your steadfast love that has been revealed to us. May we know that you are with us in all things old and new, and that you are there in every transition. We pray that you help us to face any change with faith and perseverance because you are with us. May we worship you in spirit and truth this hour, and may we proclaim the love of our savior is for all people. And it is in Jesus’ name we pray this day. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 44

*We have heard with our ears, O God; our ancestors have told us what deeds you performed in their days, in the days of old: you with your own hand drove out the nations, but them you planted; you afflicted the peoples, but them you set free; for not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm give them victory, but your right hand, and your arm, and the light of your countenance, for you delighted in them. You are my King and my God; you command victories for Jacob. Through you we push down our foes; through your name we tread down our assailants. For not in my bow do I trust, nor can my sword save me. But you have saved us from our foes and have put to confusion those who hate us. In God we have boasted continually, and we will give thanks to your name forever.*  
(*Psalm 44:1-8 NRSV\**)

We read the words of the 44th Psalm and we hear about trusting God. That we give thanks that God is with us. That God’s salvation is there for his people. Do you give thanks that God watches over you? Do you praise the Lord for the blessings in your life? How do you share those blessings with others? In what ways can you share God’s love with the people in your life? How has your life changed because of God? How can we help others to experience the joy of Christ in their lives?

**Prayer:** O God, help us to remember all that you are for us. May we always celebrate your steadfast love in all the ways that we experience it. May you bless us in your love and your peace so that we may share that love and peace with others. Help us to show love to each other as a sign of our love for you. May we show the compassion and mercy that has been shown to us through Christ our Lord. As we reach out to you with our joys and our concerns, may you build us up in your mercy and grace. May you lift us up in both laughter and tears that we may always find comfort in you. And may you strengthen us in our celebrations and our sorrows, knowing that you are with us always. And it is in Jesus name that we pray. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Sermon:**

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from 2 Kings chapter 2 verses 1 through 14.

*Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, "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. The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent." Elijah said to him, "Elisha, 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. The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; keep silent." Then Elijah said to him, "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. Fifty men of the company of prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and the two of them crossed on dry ground. When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." He responded, "You have asked a hard thing, yet if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water. He said, "Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah? Where is he?" He struck the water again, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha crossed over.*

*(2 Kings 2:1-14 NRSV\*)*

Our other reading for today comes from John chapter 1 verse 14 and verses 16 through 18.

*And There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but he confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No."  
(John 1:6-9, 19-21 NRSV\*)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

So, we are one week away from the Transfiguration. This week, we look at the prophet Elijah and how he gives us an insight into the prophets and transition. Understanding Elijah helps us to understand the Transfiguration. Our reading this week takes us to the transition of Elijah passing his mantle to Elisha. And I do apologize as I will try to be as clear as I can about Elijah and Elisha because the names are of course rather similar. So, we begin with our readings from Second Kings. And it begins with a statement that really won't make much sense until we get to the end of the reading. It talks about how this all happens before Elijah was to be taken up by a whirlwind. This frames where our reading is headed and the uniqueness of today's reading. Because we see Elijah and Elisha as they are traveling, and Elisha refuses to leave Elijah's side. Elijah keeps telling Elisha that he can stop, but he keeps telling Elijah that he will not leave him. And at each stop the company of prophets asks if Elisha knows that God is about to take Elijah from him. And he does know. But he still will not leave his side. So, the two of them travel, and they come to the Jordan. Elijah takes his mantle, rolls it up, and strikes the water. The water is parted by the power Elijah has from God. Now that they are here, Elijah wants to know what it is Elisha wants before he's gone. What will help him in this time of transition? And Elisha asks for double share of Elijah's spirit. Elijah tells him that he's asked for something difficult but that if he watches he will receive. It is then that a chariot of fire comes down and takes Elijah and he ascends into heaven. And Elisha is left to mourn.

But that's not the end of our story. Because Elisha picks up Elijah's mantle. A mantle is a kind of cape or cloak if you were wondering. Elisha takes up Elijah's mantle and he strikes the water of the Jordan and asks where God is. He strikes the water again and it is parted. So, Elisha crosses the Jordan on dry land and returns. Now there's a lot to unpack here. But I wanted to touch on John the Baptist before we dive too deeply into this. We've been going through the first chapter of John in connection with our readings for Transfiguration. Today's mentions Elijah and it has to do with John the Baptist. Because John is also a figure of transition. John has been called to testify to the light. That John himself was not the light but he was called to testify. And who is the light? The light is Christ. While John is out baptizing, people want to know who he is. So, John tells them who he isn't. He is not the Messiah. He is not the prophet. He is not Elijah. So, who is John? John is there to testify to the coming of Jesus. John is there as a figure of transition. More than a prophet, John is there to declare that Christ is coming. There's a reason that people wanted to know if John the Baptist was Elijah.

Because it was said that Elijah would return to usher in the age of the Messiah, God's Anointed, God's chosen, the person who would lead Israel into a new glory. Elijah takes on a very important role because of how he was taken up. That Elijah didn't die, but Elijah was taken to God. And Elijah becomes very important symbolically. We see a transition from Elijah to Elisha. Elijah knew he was going so he passes along his prophetic spirit to Elisha, to carry on speaking God's truth. And he is able to proclaim that truth as we see him take up Elijah's mantle. Though this is often thought of symbolically, it is also very literal in this case. Elisha has this one gift from Elijah so that he can carry on. He is given that double portion of the spirit because he witnessed Elijah being taken.

From there the story of Elijah grows until people believe firmly that Elijah is coming back to proclaim the Messiah. That's part of what we see in the Transfiguration when we see Moses and Elijah with Christ on the mountaintop. We have a new transition, and we see that responsibility, that mantle, is once again being passed. That Moses is there to show a transition to the law being made complete in Christ. Elijah is there to usher in the Messiah and to show that the prophets are fulfilled in Christ. Jesus is there in all of God's glory, uniting the law and the prophets to set the people free from sin and death. This transition shows all things made complete in Christ. This is the new beginning, a combination of everything that has come before. I think it's important that we recognize the transitions that we see here. John the Baptist is not claiming to be anything more than somebody announcing the good news that God's chosen is coming. He is calling people to repent and to prepare, to change their hearts and their lives and turn to God because the time is near. And he's a figure of transition because he is trying to get people to change and point towards where they need to be. And we can forget that we are in a sort of transition ourselves. Sometimes we like to think that we have been saved, and it is all past tense, forgetting that we are still in transition ourselves. Because I know I still need God's grace, because I still need to repent. I still find things in my life where I need to change to do better. So I'm always in a sort of transition, always turning towards Christ, always seeking God's grace in my life so that I can turn from those things that are harmful. That I am in a transition from a life of sin to a life in Christ. Always seeking forgiveness and always seeking to forgive. That we are called to turn from those things that draw us away from Christ. But it also means that I'm making the call to others to be in a transition away from sin and death to a life in Christ. To turn from a life of sorrow and sin to find peace and hope in Christ.

We too are called to be a witness to God's glory. We see many stories about those testifying to their faith and people being changed. Elisha witnesses God taking Elijah up and he carries on Elijah's prophetic mission. John the Baptist testifies to the one who would come after him. That he would pave the way, even if he wasn't even worthy of untying his sandal. And we see the disciples at the Transfiguration bearing witness to God's glory in Christ, there with Moses and Elijah on the mountaintop. We are called to bear witness to God's glory in our lives, to the saving grace that has touched our hearts and moved us. That we are called to serve Christ, called to speak out and to share the good news. The good news of God's great love for

you and for me for everyone. That we know that God will be with us whatever changes we may face. That like Elisha splitting the waters, God is there to show us what is next. Like John the Baptist proclaiming he is neither Messiah nor Elijah, but that he was himself. One called to proclaim God's love. So let us know that Christ is with us in all of the ups and downs, all of the changes that we may see. Let us know we are never alone and that we are always in God's love. And may we know God's glory in the world around us and know that God is there for everyone. So let us take up that mantle, so that we too may proclaim the good news of Christ yesterday, today, and forevermore. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Our Current Series – Relational God**

Our current series takes inspiration from the story of the Transfiguration. Each week we look at a different relational aspect of God and move through the first chapter of John. We look at Abraham, Moses, and Elijah and finish with the story of the Transfiguration of Christ.

January 22nd – *God of Creation* – Genesis 1:1-2:3; John 1:1-5

January 29th – *God of Declaration* – Genesis 17:1-8, 15-22; John 1:10-13

February 5th – *God of Revelation* – Exodus 33:12-23, 34:4-9, 27-29; John 1:14, 16-18

February 12th – *God of Transition* – 2 Kings 2:1-14; John 1:6-9, 19-21

February 19th – *God of Transformation* – Matthew 17:1-9; John 1:29-34

## **Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Eric Veach	Ed & Verna Titus
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Tricia Adkins
Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gabel
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Chuck Hogan
Brittany Gilbert	Jackie Potter	Phil Hawickhorst	Ray Carr
Jane Williams	Alice Sherwood	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks
Steve Carlen	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz	Donna Carlen
Ernie Peters	Jess shoot	Alberta Darling	Family of Janet Dixon
Stanley Kiser	Family of Kyle Lehman	Corrine Howard	Stacy Janes
Family of Ann Pennington	Don Gilmore	Griffin Neidigh	Shirley Jester
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson
Nick & Leana Ochoa	Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Kristen & Zach Morecraft	Greg Williams
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Lavon Figgins
Janet Freeman			

Rev Camron D St.Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

[cdstmichael@outlook.com](mailto:cdstmichael@outlook.com)

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

\* Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

+ Scripture quotations are from the Common English Bible, Copyright © 2011 by Common English Bible.