

Transformed: Elijah

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael –February 23 2025

7th Sunday after Epiphany

Readings: 1 Kings 19:11-14; 2 Kings 2:1-14; Luke 1:13-17 CEB

Reflection: Psalm 62

Greeting: Let my whole being bless the Lord! Lord my God, how fantastic you are! You are clothed in glory and grandeur! You make the clouds your chariot, going around on the wings of the wind. You make the winds your messengers and you make fire and flame your ministers. I will sing to the Lord as long as I live. Let my whole being bless the Lord! Praise the Lord! (Psalm 104)

Prayer: Precious Lord, we have seen the way that you can change hearts and lives through your steadfast love and faithfulness. May you help us to remember the transformation we see in the lives that you have touched. That we may remember the faithfulness of your servant Elijah and how he spoke your truth to power as you changed the world. Grant that we may know your peace and grace so that we may share it with others. May you lift our hearts in worship so that we may sing your praises and glorify your name. Help us to reach out to one another this day so that we may love our neighbor as ourselves as we further devote ourselves to loving you, O God. May you prepare us so that we may be transformed and call others to a life that is changed through walking with Jesus Christ, our Lord and friend. And it is in his name that we pray this day. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 62

⁵For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. ⁶He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. ⁷On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God. ⁸Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. ⁹Those of low estate are but a breath; those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath. ¹⁰Put no confidence in extortion, and set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them. (Psalm 62:5-10 CEB+)

We read the words of Psalm 62, and we hear of God's salvation. That God is our rock and our refuge. That we wait in silence, knowing that it is there that we find God in our prayers. How can you do more to listen for God in the silent stillness like Elijah? How have you had your own life changed by God's love? How do you share the love of Christ with others so that they can also experience that kind of transformation? Who will you lift up in your prayers this week? Who is it that you can help through the love of Christ?

Prayer: Eternal God, we thank you for always being there for us. That you are with us in the good and the bad, in the easy and the difficult. We are grateful that you are with us in all that we are and all that we do. Today we remember the promise you made when you transformed Elijah that he could speak your truth. May we remember the many blessings that you have shown to your people. We come before you in prayer this day lifting up the many joys and concerns that we have. We lift up our celebrations that we may celebrate them with you. We lift up our sorrows so that we may find comfort in your presence. We come together to share the prayers that we have lifted up aloud together. But we also lift up the unspoken prayers that we hold in our hearts. For we know that you hear every prayer that we lift up to you. May you strengthen us in the prayers we speak and the silent pleadings from within. May we know you are there in both our laughter and our tears. May we remember you in our dancing and our mourning. For you are always with us, Lord. May we experience your great love that transforms lives. May we love ever deeper because you are with us. And may we always celebrate Jesus Christ, our steadfast friend and Savior. 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 Common English Bible. Our first reading is from 1 Kings chapter 19, verses 11 through 14.

¹¹ The Lord said, "Go out and stand at the mountain before the Lord. The Lord is passing by." A very strong wind tore through the mountains and broke apart the stones before the Lord. But the Lord wasn't in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake. But the Lord wasn't in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake, there was a fire. But the Lord wasn't in the fire. After the fire, there was a sound. Thin. Quiet. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his coat. He went out and stood at the cave's entrance. A voice came to him and said, "Why are you here, Elijah?" ¹⁴ He said, "I've been very passionate for the Lord God of heavenly forces because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars, and they have murdered your prophets with the sword. I'm the only one left, and now they want to take my life too."

(1 Kings 19:11-14 CEB+)

Our next reading is from 2 Kings chapter 2, verse 1 through 14.

¹ Now the Lord was going to take Elijah up to heaven in a windstorm, and Elijah and Elisha were leaving Gilgal. ² Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, because the Lord has sent me to Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives and as you live, I won't leave you." So they went down to Bethel. ³ The group of prophets from Bethel came out to Elisha. These prophets said to Elisha, "Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master away from you today?" Elisha said, "Yes, I know. Don't talk about it!" ⁴ Elijah said, "Elisha, stay here,

because the Lord has sent me to Jericho.” But Elisha said, “As the Lord lives and as you live, I won’t leave you.” So they went to Jericho. ⁵ The group of prophets from Jericho approached Elisha and said to him, “Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master away from you today?” He said, “Yes, I know. Don’t talk about it!” ⁶ Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here, because the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.” But Elisha said, “As the Lord lives and as you live, I won’t leave you.” So both of them went on together. ⁷ Fifty members from the group of prophets also went along, but they stood at a distance. Both Elijah and Elisha stood beside the Jordan River. ⁸ Elijah then took his coat, rolled it up, and hit the water. Then the water was divided in two! Both of them crossed over on dry ground. ⁹ When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “What do you want me to do for you before I’m taken away from you?” Elisha said, “Let me have twice your spirit.” ¹⁰ Elijah said, “You’ve made a difficult request. If you can see me when I’m taken from you, then it will be yours. If you don’t see me, it won’t happen.” ¹¹ They were walking along, talking, when suddenly a fiery chariot and fiery horses appeared and separated the two of them. Then Elijah went to heaven in a windstorm. ¹² Elisha was watching, and he cried out, “Oh, my father, my father! Israel’s chariots and its riders!” When he could no longer see him, Elisha took hold of his clothes and ripped them in two. ¹³ Then Elisha picked up the coat that had fallen from Elijah. He went back and stood beside the banks of the Jordan River. ¹⁴ He took the coat that had fallen from Elijah and hit the water. He said, “Where is the Lord, Elijah’s God?” And when he hit the water, it divided in two! Then Elisha crossed over. (2 Kings 2:1-14 CEB+)

Our final reading is from Luke chapter 1, verse 13 through 17.

¹³ The angel said, “Don’t be afraid, Zechariah. Your prayers have been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will give birth to your son and you must name him John. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many people will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the Lord’s eyes. He must not drink wine and liquor. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before his birth. ¹⁶ He will bring many Israelites back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ He will go forth before the Lord, equipped with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will turn the hearts of fathers back to their children, and he will turn the disobedient to righteous patterns of thinking. He will make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” (Luke 1:13-17 CEB+)

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

We are nearing the very end of our “Transformed” series, and this week we come to the second person that we see with Jesus on the mountain in the Transfiguration. Today we discuss Elijah. Elijah in the Transfiguration is meant to represent the prophets. A part of that is because of Elijah’s legacy, a legacy that is transformed in itself by God. I say that because we see a lot from Elijah that really alters the way that people see things and what they expect to have happen. Elijah has a very long career as a prophet, and so we see him doing a lot. I chose two separate readings about Elijah and his time as a prophet, because I think both of them highlight different transformations and why Elijah is important.

Our first look comes from a much larger narrative in 1 Kings. I mention that because some of the details might seem lacking, but it's because if I were to give all of Elijah's story, we would not have time for much anything else. What we see here, though, is that Elijah has fled for safety, and Elijah is trying to figure out what to do next. And it's understandable that Elijah is frightened, because it is powerful people calling for his head. So, when Elijah goes and searches out God, he is told to go stand at the mountain, and he will know the Lord is passing by. Here we get a rather interesting picture of God. This interaction transforms Elijah's trajectory, where he is headed. And I think it teaches him about the character of God, and in turn, we all learn something about God from this interaction. One of the things that we see is that Elijah sees a series of very strong, very powerful things happen. A strong wind rips through the mountain, shattering stones, and yet God's not the wind. After the wind, there is a tremendous earthquake, except God's not in the earthquake. After that, there's fire, and when Elijah looks, God is not in this fire either. We do not find God in the strong winds, in the earthquake, in the fires, in these monumental acts. God is not there. But after all this, Elijah hears a sound, thin and quiet. It's then that he goes out, and a voice comes to him. There in that silent stillness, Elijah finds God, and he makes his case. Now what I get from this is that Elijah was looking for power and might but finds God in the small stillness. He does not find God in chaos and destruction but finds God in silent contemplation. And I think that matters because too often our image of God is the fire, and the earthquake, and the whirlwind, and powerful shows. But here's the thing that I have learned over the years. People who have to make a show of their power don't really have power. They make a show of it because they have to convince you that they do have power. They have to convince you that they are strong. What we see here is the opposite. The powerful, the truly powerful, don't need signs. They don't have to impress. They don't have anything to prove. I think that's something Elijah takes away from this interaction with God that transforms the way that he sees God. In this still, small voice that comes to him, and he finds the Lord. He finds the strength he needs. He finds the answers he needs to continue moving forward. He finds them in the quiet and in that personal connection with God.

Now, we jump to the end of Elijah's ministry as we step into our reading from 2 Kings. This time Elijah is going to be taken, and Elisha goes with him. And Elisha asks for a double share of his spirit, for twice the spirit of Elijah. We see a fiery chariot and horses appear, and Elijah ascended into a whirlwind. A windstorm comes and sweeps Elijah up, and Elisha is left alone. But when Elisha picks up the coat that Elijah dropped, he has the spirit of Elijah with him. And when he strikes the water, it divides in two. Proof that he got that double share of the spirit. Now, this gift of the prophetic spirit is something that we see continued on in our other reading. But I want to briefly mention that what we see here isn't so much a transformation of Elijah, as much as a transformation of his legacy. I say that because Elijah is now gone. Elisha is left behind with that prophetic spirit to carry on Elijah's legacy. This account transforms how people see the prophet Elijah, and what they expect to have happen in the future. Because now the expectation is not just that Elijah's spirit will carry on as it does with Elisha, but now there is the expectation that Elijah will return. There is a transformation of the legacy that Elijah has, and we see that in our reading from the Gospel of Luke.

When we hear about John the Baptist, we hear about that legacy. In Luke's Gospel, we are told that people are going to rejoice at John's birth. That he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. That he will bring Israelites back to the Lord. That he will be equipped with the spirit and the power of Elijah, this great prophet. He will carry on that tradition. That John the Baptist will be great, and they will know his greatness because he will be like Elijah. We get this amazing link to the prophetic legacy. That the prophets speaking God's truth, the prophets speaking of what people should do to properly serve God, continues on in John the Baptist. That as he speaks of Christ, he is speaking the truth of God, and how God is going to reach the people. That he is going to turn people back to God by telling them about the salvation that is to come. And all of this hearkens back to Elijah, because it is that prophetic spirit of truth that Elijah had that is with John the Baptist.

We see all of these things outlining Elijah, because Elijah had a very faithful spirit. Elijah served God. Even when Elijah was afraid, Elijah ran to God. And when Elijah isn't sure which way to go, Elijah turns to God for guidance and finds it. Elijah speaks the truth of God, no matter what's going on, no matter where he is. And when it's time, he passes that spirit of truth along, because he can share God's truth, and he can share the power to share that truth. But even in the most difficult of situations, Elijah listens. In those difficult days, Elijah hears that still small voice, and knows it is God, and lets that transform him. It is something that we will see next week when we think about the Transfiguration. That we have that spirit of truth and power that comes with Elijah, arriving with the idea of Moses and the law, all of them culminating in Jesus. But we see a completion of the law and the spirit of the prophets all brought together. So, I wanted to really touch on Elijah here, and this ability to see God in the small. To find God in the quiet. And to carry that spirit of truth with him always. And that when it is time, Elijah passes it along. Now, I can't tell you exactly what it means that Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind. There is so much debate about that, and I wanted to say that I can't tell you a definitive reason for it, because there is not one. One of the things that does come to mind, though, is that Elijah spoke God's truth. And it is symbolic of the way that when Elijah goes, Elijah passes the spirit on and doesn't try to keep it for himself. That it is a spirit of truth that carries on today, because it is a spirit of truth that passes to each person that takes up the gospel message of speaking the truth of God and the salvation we find in Christ.

My goal in this message today was to share this picture of Elijah, this faithful servant. How even in his difficult times, he turned to God, seeking God's truth and God's wisdom. And that with that, we get this idea of a man that serves God with all that he has and passes that along to the next generation. That is something that we can do. That we share our gifts with those who come after us so that they will be even stronger than we are. Because Elijah hears that still small voice and eventually passes along a double share of his spirit. And I like to think it comes with a double share of his wisdom and a double share of his courage. It is the spirit that we see in John the Baptist speaking truth to power, even at great risk to himself. Sharing hope for the least and the last. Both speak against those in power, even when it endangers their own lives. That we see it with Elijah, and we see it with John the Baptist, and we see it in Christ. Because they speak the truth that needs to be heard no matter what. I pray that prophetic spirit can be with us all. That our lives may be transformed by the truth of God as we

see it and as we live it. And may we always look at the way that we can say yes through faith to having our own hearts and our own lives transformed by the love of God through living a life in Jesus Christ our Lord. And may we always accept the invitation from Christ to have our own lives be transformed. 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 – Transformed

This series is a 7-week series about transformation. Each week will look at a different person from the Bible that was transformed by God. Each one tells a unique story about God's love and grace that are there for all people. Each person's tale of transformation gives us insight into how God can heal our brokenness. And each gives us hope that we may all be Transformed through a life in Jesus Christ.

1/19: Abraham & Sarah 1/26: Jacob 2/2: Zacchaeus 2/9: Paul

2/16: Moses 2/23: Elijah 3/2: Jesus

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Toledo UMC

Madison & Ohio St
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Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC

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