



# ***The Westminster Pulpit***

Sermons Preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church  
3900 West End Avenue Nashville, Tennessee 37205-1899

## ***“Life Transition”*** **Sermon on 2 Kings 1:1-2, 6-14**

Donovan A. Drake

Third Sunday after Pentecost  
June 26, 2022

Last week we heard about the great prophet, Elijah, who suddenly burned out on ministry. He went to the holy high mountain of Moses to speak to God and get some answers. God said, “What are you doing here? Get back to work! Anoint a few kings and anoint Elisha to come after you.” It’s a time of transition.

### ***2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14***

Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. <sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Fifty men of the company of prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. <sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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.” <sup>10</sup> 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.” <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. <sup>14</sup> 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.

When my children were still quite young, I enjoyed reading them bedtime stories. And if their mother wasn't in the room, I would add an addendum. When I came to the end of, say, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, he "nibbled a hole in his cocoon and pushed his way out and was a very beautiful butterfly," I would add, "and then was accepted to college on a merit scholarship, got a job and bought his own apartment and worked to help his parents through retirement." "That's not how mommy reads it," they would say. I know.

But I do believe the subliminal education helped my children over the years to transition off of the payroll.

There are transitions that you know are coming for which you can prepare. As Luke wrote and Lib read, "When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up" - that's a statement by Luke that helps you prepare. You know what's coming. In the passage I read, the same thing is happening. "Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah to heaven..." "... the Lord was about to..." It hasn't happened yet. There's time to prepare. We need the time to prepare.

Someone on the Supreme Court leaked the opinion; that's never happened. Why do you suppose that was done? Time to prepare. In nine months, the baby arrives; time to prepare. College in 18 years; time to prepare. Retirement in seven years; time to prepare. "When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up..." "Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah to heaven..." The transition is coming; you just know it. The transition is happening.

But there are also transitions that happen in the blink of an eye. My wife and I were riding bikes on Monday, then suddenly we weren't riding bikes. She had caught a bad spot in the road and flipped over her handlebars, landed on her helmet. A trip to the emergency room. No broken bones. Could have been much worse. But when it happened, everything planned evaporated. Transition.

Transitions can happen in the blink of an eye. We try to soften the blow by buying insurance of one kind or another. Insurance can be a policy. Insurance can be CPR training. Insurance can be the pistol beside your bed. Sometimes it works - being prepared for the quick transition. Sometimes it doesn't. What were the words that the head of the Texas State Police used to sum up what happened in Uvalde? "Abject failure." Officers who were trained for situations like this did not seize the transitional moment and the life was lost. The life was lost. The life was lost.

We prepare, and yet we can be so unprepared for life's transitions.

Elisha knows that Elijah is not long for this world. And so, he says, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." When you are so aware of the

fragility of life, you hold onto every precious second. Perhaps you know what it is like to maintain the vigil - watching the one you love and waiting on every breath. The prayer is spoken in soft whisper. "As you yourself live, I will not leave you."

You knew the time was coming and yet, when the fiery chariot arrives you just feel so unprepared. Nothing makes sense. After a while, you start to pick up the pieces, one at a time. You pick up another. You keep picking up the pieces, but whatever it is that you're trying to assemble will have a hole in it the shape and size of the one you love.

Elisha bent down and picked up the mantle of Elijah. It wasn't his, but now it is. And yet it's not all his, some of it will always be that of the one who gave it away. We know this. Our lives are not our own, they are continually being shaped by what others leave us. When they leave us, we weep, because we have some piece left of who they are. It's ours but it is still theirs.

Transition.

"When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to Jerusalem. He sent messengers ahead of him. On their way, they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set to Jerusalem." Jesus has made the transition. He hasn't arrived in Jerusalem, but it's like he's already there. You know how it is – you can be in someone's presence, but they're not there. They've already moved on. Someone will say, "What's the matter? What are you thinking about? You don't seem to be present." "I'm thinking about what I have to do for work tomorrow." They're not with you. They're somewhere else. The Samaritans didn't receive him because "his face was set to Jerusalem." Scholars say that the Samaritans never cared for the pilgrims heading to Jerusalem. You know how it is being second rate.

When I lived in Durham, it suffered from not being Chapel Hill. Bottom of the barrel to Raleigh and Chapel Hill. "Oh, you live in Durham." Before the plane would land, the flight attendant would say, "As we prepare to land in Raleigh..." Then, someone in the cabin would offer a corrective yell, "Raleigh-Durham." Scholars believe that Samaritans didn't care for pilgrims passing through.

I think there's something else going on. They didn't accept him because his road was too hard. People who take the hard road are not often embraced, an example of which you hear in the text. The Samaritans didn't receive him. James and John said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" So righteous they were in the sense of being wronged! Don't you know righteous anger! When the world doesn't go your way and so you think with all justice, I will return to the one evil for evil.

He shot the judge. She murdered her ex. He mowed down the crowd. They commanded fire to come down from heaven. Righteous anger. "Lord, do you want us to ...? Because we'll take a flamethrower to this place!" I suppose if his face was set to any other direction, he might have agreed. But as I said, he took the hard road, his face set to Jerusalem, and he rebuked them. He told them they were wrong! Hard road.

Life is more complicated than Jew good and Samaritan bad. Issues are more complicated. “Do you want us to take a flamethrower to this place?”

No, and I’ll tell you why. There’s going to be a lawyer who will ask, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Sounds like he’s ready to change his ways. “Well, you know. You are to love your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind and love your neighbor as yourself.” “Well, who is my neighbor?” There will be a story about that hard road, and there will be someone who knows what to say, and that person will be a Samaritan. A man who fell victim to robbers was left dead on a road. Everyone in the religious community had better things to do. He would have died. Transition. In the blink of an eye - grace up on grace - he bound the man’s wounds, put him on the horse, and got him to the inn. And do you know who that was? A Samaritan. Should we take a flame thrower to this place? No.

Part of what we do here in this place is train for the transitions. We get baptized. We read our bibles. We hear the scripture, and we pray. And every once in a while, we’re called upon to make a decision. Do we implement our training? That is, do we set our face to Jerusalem, or do we just walk on by?

She flipped over her handlebars. I heard her scream, then moan. I turned my bike around; oh, my, bleeding, moaning in pain. A man said, “I’ll call 911.” He stayed on the phone. He handed me my water bottle so that I could wash away the blood. He stood in the sun to help keep her in the shade. The ambulance driver said to me, “I can’t take you in the ambulance.” The stranger picked up our bicycles, put them up on his vehicle, and he took me home.

He had other options. But, in the blink of an eye, he said, “I’m going to help you.” I don’t know if he ever went to church a day in his life, but I do know that stranger knows a lot about eternal life and what it looks like. “Should we take a flame thrower to this place?” “No. We rain mercy on this place.”

For there will come a day when ten will cry from the side of the road. “Lord, Jesus, have mercy on us.” And the Lord had mercy, and the ten lepers went away. But only one saw that he was healed. Transition. With a loud voice, he praised God, and knelt at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. Transition. There was one who realized where his salvation came from, and that one was a Samaritan. “Should we rain fire down on them?” No. Rain down mercy.

It is why we are here. You have been training yourself in hearing the Word of God your whole life long! It’s been something that your parents and grandparents handed you before they left in the fiery chariot. You picked up the pieces, the faith.

Now, there is going to be a moment when you will have the choice of doing what you want to do or setting your face to Jerusalem. That moment can be the stuff that makes for eternal life: joy, peace, hope, love, care. Or, it can be, what were the words? Oh yes, “An abject failure.” Transition. There is still mercy. And maybe the one who is left will know the mercy, and in a loud voice proclaim, “Thanks be to God.”