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Immanuel Lutheran Church – Burns, WY (Dual-parish service with St. John's)

Advent II – Midweek

December 13, 2017

Text: II Kings 13:14–21; I Corinthians 15:50–58      Pictures of Redemption – Death

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The picture presented to you last Wednesday was one of redemption from sin. Isaiah the prophet saw God high and lifted up on His heavenly throne. Because Isaiah was a sinner, he needed an act of redemption; a divine act of bringing him back from the clutches of death and judgment into a right, joyful relationship to His God. Isaiah's problem was sin. God's act of redemption was to touch Isaiah's lips with a hot, sanctified coal from the heavenly altar. His sin was forgiven and redeemed.

Tonight we get another picture of redemption, redemption from death. I want you to imagine what was taking place in tonight's first reading from II Kings 13:14–21. I chose that text for tonight's service for two reasons. First, it's very picturesque; it's easy to imagine the scene. Second, it's a unique event in the OT that doesn't get much attention. All that changes tonight!

I want you to imagine an OT prophet of God. Picture Elisha, that great prophet of God who succeeded and followed another great prophet of God, Elijah. Elisha had performed many miracles during his ministry. Some of the most interesting are: he made an axe head float on the water so the man who lost it could retrieve it; he healed Naaman from leprosy by commanding him to dip seven times in the Jordan River; a poor widow's two children were saved from being sold into slavery because the widow, at the command of Elisha, was able to fill miraculously many, many jars with oil and then she sold the oil to pay off her debts, and maybe most notably, Elisha raising the dead son of a Shunammite woman.

But now Elisha himself is on his deathbed. Joash, king of Israel comes to Elisha for one last miracle. Using a bow and arrow as an object lesson, Elisha prophesies that King Joash will defeat the Syrians. It was a great promise of victory. And then Elisha dies. The Bible rather dryly and bluntly says, "So Elisha died, and they buried him" (vs. 20). So you need to imagine a big funeral service with all the pomp and circumstance for a very beloved prophet and man of God. But you must imagine something a bit different than our modern funerals and burials. Elisha was buried in a

sepulcher or a tomb on the surface of the ground. His tomb would have had a door that could be opened and closed. Or, the opening would have been covered by a large stone. Finally, in those days, the body was generally wrapped in strips of cloth rather encased in a casket.

Sometime after Elisha's death, another man died. It happened during the warm, spring-time of the year. We don't know anything about him, not even his name. So imagine another funeral service, probably not so large or notable, but very near the tomb of Elisha. The funeral procession is interrupted by a raiding band of Moabites. I like to picture men clothed with desert garb, turbans, and swords strapped to their sides riding on camels. The Bible doesn't say those things but that's what I imagine.

During this second funeral service, this dangerous, marauding band of Moabites invaded the land of Israel. The man who had died was hastily pushed into Elisha's tomb. An attack is taking place. There's no time for ceremony. We've got to get out of here and find a place of safety. They open the door to Elisha's tomb, or remove the large covering stone, and quickly push the dead man into Elisha's tomb. A miracle unparalleled in the Bible occurs. The unnamed man who had died is raised from the dead and stands on his feet. How does this happen? In their haste to push the unnamed man into Elisha's tomb, the two bodies touch. Through contact with Elisha's body, the second man is raised from the dead! Imagine that. What do you think would cause more awe (probably fear as well!)? The marauding band of Moabites or a man who had died raised from the dead because he had touched the corpse of the prophet Elisha!

It's a picture of redemption dear saints of God, redemption from Death; that great and terrible leveler of all mankind. Have we not lost a true sense of the horror at what death is what it has done and continues to do to us human beings? Because of our sins, our lives are handed over to the fate of death. This is not how it was supposed to be. God the Father almighty did not create us human beings to know and experience the awful sting of death. In today's way of talking, we speak of dying as being natural. But in fact, death is the most unnatural, the most out-of-place event we humans experience.

We need redemption, that is, we desperately need an act of salvation whereby the power and consequences of death are reversed, just like the resurrection of the unnamed man. Picture the marvel of this miracle. Through one man's death, Elisha's, another man is resurrected. Does that not sound wondrously familiar?! Because of the

death of a far greater prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ, we have life and resurrection. Because Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried, you and me have resurrection life. He died that we might live. Because of Jesus, death has become powerless. The apostle Paul composed a sort of divine taunt, a holy mockery of Death, if you will, in tonight's reading from I Corinthians 15, "O Death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" In other words, you can't touch me, O Death! Your victory, which seems so certain, so unstoppable is a pathetic joke.

Imagine this! Jesus, God's eternal Son becomes incarnate of the Virgin Mary. He is born and raised in absolute obscurity until the time appointed by His Heavenly Father arrives. He heals the sick and oppressed. And yes, He raises the dead: the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7), Jairus' daughter (Mark 5), and Lazarus after he had been buried in a tomb for 4 days (John 11). After three years of demonstrating His power over disease and death, Jesus willingly goes in love to Calvary to be crucified unto death in order to remove death's sting and power. He redeems us from death by His own death. He destroys death through death. He gave it a taste of its own disgusting medicine.

And yes, most gloriously yes, on the third day Jesus rises from the dead. His miracle is greater than Elisha's recorded in II Kings 13. For Jesus Himself rises from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity for us and for our glorious salvation. "Behold, I tell you a mystery...we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye...and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable...When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory'" (15:51-54). Always, always, picture that act of redemption, dear redeemed saints of God.

But we need not only imagine this act of redemption from death. We also experience it. During our Sunday divine service, we begin with the words, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Those powerful, divine words signal to us a redemptive event greater and more glorious than all the universe: your Christian baptism in water combined with God's name and Word. I baptize you (insert your name here!) in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Those words are a constant reminder of God's redemptive act whereby He saved and is saving you from the power of death. Our Catechism teaches us that baptism "works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare." You and I are redeemed

saints and victorious conquerors over death in and through our Lord Jesus Christ. Those are the words and promises of God!!

And we experience everyday by repentance and faith what happened to the unnamed man in Elisha's tomb. We are revived, forgiven of all sin, and stand before God in the purity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do we not confess in the Small Catechism, "(Baptism) indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever." We need not fear death. For we have entered into the eternal life and salvation of the living Christ. Death is swallowed up in our Lord's victory, a victory now ours. That's the picture of redemption from death I want you to have always.

By the grace of the Holy Spirit let us fix our eyes upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.