

Now that Cori and I are moving to New Ulm, we have started to go through the stuff in our house. As we go through all of our stuff, we of course have to decide what things we want to keep and what things it is time to part with. And sometimes that's easy. Sometimes you're glad to throw something away. But sometimes Cori or I will come across something that's hard to part with.

It's hard even with things that we know we are never going to use again. It might be a piece of clothing that I haven't worn in years and that I probably will never wear again. But for whatever reason it's hard to part with this piece of clothing. Whatever it might be, we know it's time, but we're still not ready to let that particular item go.

If we sometimes have a hard time parting with trivial things like clothes, how much more difficult is it to part with people whom we love! Can you think of some times in life when we might face the impending departure of a loved one. Maybe a loved one is moving away. Or maybe you know that God might soon take a loved one to heaven.

Sometimes we're not ready to let go because we're nervous about the future. You can't imagine what life will be like when that person is gone. We could even think about this in the church. In the past few weeks you've found out that three of your called workers will be moving on. And you might wonder, how is the Lord going to supply workers for our church?

If you are nervous or sad about an impending departure, whether it's the impending departure of a loved one from this life or the impending departure of a called worker, if you're nervous or sad about the impending departure of a loved one, then this story about Elijah and Elisha can help us.

The main thing that I want us to get from God's word today is that what Jesus has done does not change our emotions but it completely changes our perspective on impending departures. What Jesus has done does not change many of our emotions but it completely changes our perspective on impending departures.

Let's look at that first part first. What Jesus has done does not change many of our emotions about an impending departure. Christians go through a grieving process like everybody else. You can even see Elisha going through a process throughout this story.

In the first part of the process he knows that the departure is coming. And since he knows that the departure is coming, he refuses to leave Elijah. Three times in our story, Elijah says, "Stay here Elisha. The LORD has sent me to Bethel, and then to Jericho, and then to the Jordan." (2:2, 4, 6) And each time Elisha says, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you" (2 Kings 2:2, 4, 6). Elisha was loyal to Elijah and didn't want to leave him.

Elisha saw the departure coming and he didn't want to think about or talk about the departure. Twice some prophets come up to him and say, "**Do you know that the LORD is going to take your master from you today?**" (2 Kings 2:3, 5) And each time Elisha replied, "**Yes I know, so be quiet**" (2 Kings 2:3, 5). Elisha didn't want to think about it and he didn't want to talk about it because it was painful for him to think about and talk about. When we know that the departure of a loved one is coming, we might not want to think about it or talk about it, because it's so painful. And that's OK. What Jesus has done doesn't change the pain we feel when a loved one departs.

Another step in the process for Elisha was grief when Elijah was taken from him. After Elijah went up to heaven in whirlwind it says, "**Then Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two**" (2 Kings 2:12). Elisha was sad that he didn't see Elijah anymore. It's OK in fact it's good for Christians to grieve when a loved one departs.

What Jesus has done doesn't change many of the emotions when a loved one departs, but it does change your perspective. Jesus died and rose again so that we can have eternal life in heaven. Elijah went up to heaven. In verse 1 it says, "**Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind.**" And verse 11 says, "**Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.**" Elijah was taken to heaven without dying. When believers in Jesus die, they go to heaven too. And that means that when our believing loved ones die, they enter into glory. What Jesus has done, doesn't change many of the emotions we have when a loved one departs, but it does completely change our perspective. Along with our sadness we also have joy that our loved one is in the glory of heaven.

And we will see them again. Elijah was taken to heaven many hundreds of years before Jesus was born. But in the Gospel for today, there is Elijah on the Mountain of Transfiguration still alive in heaven. And we'll be reunited with our believing loved ones in heaven. You will see your believing loved ones again. What Jesus has done completely changes our perspective.

Another thing that we might think about when there is an impending departure of a loved one is, "What are things going to be like when their gone?" Elisha had that on his mind too. He especially had on his mind, "Who's going to watch over God's people spiritually once Elijah is gone?"

As Elijah was going up to heaven in the whirlwind, Elisha calls Elijah an interesting name. He calls Elijah, "**The chariots and horsemen of Israel**" (2 Kings 2:12). How was Elijah like chariots and horsemen? Well, commentators point out that chariots and horsemen protect people. And Elijah had protected the people spiritually by speaking out against Baal worship and calling the people to repentance. Who was going to do that now that Elijah was gone?

Elisha showed that he was willing to step into that role. Elijah had asked him, "**Tell me, what can I do for you, before I am taken from you?**" (2 Kings 2:9) And Elisha replied, "**Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit**" (2 Kings 2:9). Elijah and Elisha were like a father and a son. And now that the father was leaving it was appropriate for him to leave behind an inheritance. Commentators point out that in the Law of Moses it says when a father has multiple sons and he divides up the inheritance between his sons, the first-born son should get a double portion. So commentators explain that what Elisha is saying is, "Treat me like a first-born son. Let me be your heir. Let me succeed you as prophet." And one author pointed out that a double portion of Elijah's spirit would equip Elisha for that task. Elijah had great zeal for the LORD and the work of the LORD. His successor Elisha would also have great zeal for the LORD and the LORD's work.

In the church today when a called worker takes a call away, the congregation naturally asks, "Who is going to fill that role now?" This story shows that the LORD provides workers for his church. What Jesus has done doesn't change many of our emotions about departing loved ones but it does change our perspective. Here's how it changes our perspective. It changes our perspective in two ways. First: Workers might depart, but God is still here.

Elisha picked up the cloak and he went back to the Jordan and he said, "Where now is the God of Elijah?" (2 Kings 2:14). And Elisha hit the water with his cloak and the waters parted to the right and to the left. The same miracle that Elijah had just done. And that miracle the parting of the Jordan remind us of when Moses parted the Red Sea and the Israelites crossed over on dry ground. It also reminds us of the time of Joshua, when the waters of the Jordan were stopped up so that the Israelites could cross over on dry ground and enter the Promised Land. This miracle shows that the same God who was with Moses and with Joshua and with Elijah was also with Elisha. And the same God who was with Elisha is also with St. John's. Called workers might depart, but Jesus is still here.

Another way that what Jesus has done changes our perspective is that we can be sure that he will provide workers for his church. Elijah ascended up into heaven. It says that Elijah "**went up to heaven in a whirlwind**" (2 Kings 2:11). After Jesus rose from the dead he also ascended into heaven. And there in heaven Jesus rules all

things for the good of his church (Ephesians 1:20-22). Part of how he rules all things for the good of his church is by providing workers for his church. After saying that Jesus ascended on high, the book of Ephesians says that **“Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service so that the body of Christ might be built up”** (Ephesians 4:11-12). God provided workers for his church when Elijah was taken up to heaven and the ascended Lord Jesus will provide workers for his church today too.

I mentioned before that Elisha seems to go through a process in this story. At the beginning he doesn't want to think about or talk about the fact that his master is going to be taken from him. When Elijah is taken from him, he tears his garments in sadness. But at the end of the story, Elisha seems to have accepted it. The sons of the prophets come and say that we can send out a search party for Elijah. Maybe the Spirit of the LORD picked him up and set him down somewhere. And Elisha says, “No, don't send them.” He knew that his master was in heaven and that God was with him and that God would provide for the future of his Church. What Jesus has done in his death and resurrection doesn't change many of the emotions that we have when loved one depart, but it does completely change our perspective. Our believing loved ones are in heaven. And God is with us. And God will provide for the future of his church. Now we can let go, because we know God is never going to let us go. Amen.