

## In Nomine Iesu

### The Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity 2026

#### Teaching and prophecy continue to proclaim Law and Gospel – 2 Kings 2:15-25

“Now when the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho saw him opposite them, they said, ‘The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.’ And they came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him. And they said to him, ‘Behold now, there are with your servants fifty strong men. Please let them go and seek your master. It may be that the Spirit of the LORD has caught him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley.’ And he said, ‘You shall not send.’ But when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, ‘Send.’ They sent therefore fifty men. And for three days they sought him but did not find him. And they came back to him while he was staying at Jericho, and he said to them, ‘Did I not say to you, “Do not go?”’”

Now the men of the city said to Elisha, ‘Behold, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees, but the water is bad, and the land is unfruitful.’ He said, ‘Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it.’ So they brought it to him. Then he went to the spring of water and threw salt in it and said, ‘Thus says the LORD, I have healed this water; from now on neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it.’ So the water has been healed to this day, according to the word that Elisha spoke.

He went up from there to Bethel, and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, ‘Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!’ And he turned around, and when he saw them, he cursed them in the name of the LORD. And two she-bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the boys.’ From there he went on to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ.

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Where did Elijah go? The “sons of the prophets” wanted to know. Since Elisha was the only one who had gone with Elijah across the Jordan, they asked him. Because they could also see as he came toward them that Elisha had the authority of God. He wore Elijah’s cloak. He had parted the waters of the Jordan River and walked across on dry ground. As one they exclaimed, “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.” (v. 15) But they did not understand what it meant. Their thinking was little different than that of Elisha himself, who, as he had watched Elijah carried away from him into heaven, could only cry out in anguish, “My father, my father!” Elisha had accompanied Elijah even though Elijah had implored him more than once, “Please stay here!” But Elisha simply could not imagine life without Elijah, and so he followed until God Himself took the great prophet away in a most spectacular and undeniable way. Neither could these men who had been the assistants and disciples of the great prophet. Where did Elijah go? Elisha told them, much as Elijah had pleaded with him, to give it up, they would not find Elijah anywhere. Finally, Elisha relented and told the fifty young men to go ahead and search, knowing that they had to convince themselves that Elijah was no longer in Israel, that the mantle of the prophet of God had been passed from Elijah to Elisha. But what did it all mean?

## I

There is a lesson in this for us all, one that I am sure the Apostle John, the last living apostle, St. Augustine, the great father of the early church, and our own namesake, Martin Luther, all recognized in their lifetimes. But we will let the former President of France and hero of WWII, Charles DeGaulle, enunciate it for us, because he did it so well. It is recorded that near the end of his presidency as he was about to enter the

Notre Dame cathedral in Paris to attend a state funeral, that a reporter asked DeGaulle what was to become of France when he died. The man then expressed the conviction that DeGaulle was indispensable. DeGaulle famously replied, "Cemeteries are full of indispensable men."

But Elijah was not going to be one of those found in some cemetery, as DeGaulle otherwise very wisely said. Nor, to be sure, was Moses going to be found in some cemetery, because the Scriptures tell us, "Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD, and He buried him in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor; but no one knows the place of his burial to this day." (Deuteronomy 34:5-6) The Torah of Moses, that is to say, properly translated, the teaching of Moses, would not end with Moses. The prophesy of Elijah would not end with Elijah. Both would go on as Joshua succeeded Moses and Elisha succeeded Elijah. The word of God endures forever. Teaching and prophecy would continue until the last prophet and teacher of Israel, John the Baptizer, would reveal to Israel and to the world the fulfillment of what Moses and Elijah pointed to: the promised Messiah, the Savior of sinful and dying humanity. Of Him John would say, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." (John 1:29)

You see, just as the kingdom of David, which God had established in Israel, was not like the other kingdoms around them, so the land of Israel was not like that of the other lands around them. Nor were its teachers and prophets like those of any other land or people. For Israel was both a visible, physical reality and an unseen spiritual one. The promise of the Messiah, which Israel's teachers and prophets proclaimed, would save His people by giving them a land that would never be taken from them, would give them life that would never end. It would be a land to which they would point the way by their words and, in the case of Moses and Elijah, by the end of their physical lives on earth. This promised land, as their departures intimate, would not be on earth but in heaven or, as the letter to the Hebrews speaks of it, it would be in "the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God." (Hebrews 11:10)

When Moses and Elijah stood conversing with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration we can begin to see the plan God had in mind the day Moses died and the day Elijah was carried to heaven alive. It is fairly easy for us to see on that mountain, as Peter, James, and John did, the vision of those three and understand what the promises of the teachers and prophets of the Old Testament were all about. But for the children of Israel as they prepared to enter the promised land and for Elisha and the sons of the prophets who succeeded Elijah, it was more difficult. Let us consider what happened.

## II

The first two stories from the ministry of Elisha, that of the spring of water and of the hateful boys mauled by bears, do show what the sons of the prophets had said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." But on their face the two seem not so important. But again, if we remember that Israel was not just a physical reality but also a picture of a spiritual reality, there is more here than immediately strikes the eye.

In the first, men of the town, presumably Jericho, acknowledged to Elisha that theirs was a pleasant place to be, except for the fact that the local water was not good either for people or for crops, something at odds with the description of the land God had given to His people as being a land flowing with milk and honey. In other words, they appealed to the prophet of God to help them understand their situation in light of the promises given to Israel. Rather than explain, Elisha tells them to bring him a bowl of salt. But wait, how has salt ever contributed to improving the quality of water? Oh,

you can say that in certain parts of our United States of America, salt is useful for making so called hard water soft – this is something that those who’ve never lived in, for example, the midwestern states, may not understand. But while soft water helps washing machines and dishwashers do a better job of cleaning laundry and dishes, it does nothing better for drinking or growing crops. And I am pretty sure that the town of Jericho in Elisha’s day did not have too many clothes washers or dish washers. Salt is normally associated with bad rather than good water.

Nevertheless, contrary to common sense Elisha took salt, poured it into the spring and the water became beneficial rather than hurtful to the people who appealed to the God in whom they trusted. There is no naturalistic explanation of Elisha’s deed. It was a miracle. There is only the fact that Elijah’s successor responded to God’s believing people and provided for them in a way that defied logic but was nevertheless true.

In the second story, Elisha went up from the Jordan near Jericho on his way to Bethel, which is in the hill country about 4000 feet higher. Bethel was the site of one of the blasphemous altars that the northern kingdom’s first king, Jeroboam, had established to keep his people from going to the LORD’s temple. It may be that this part of Israel was devoted to the sin of Jeroboam and thus opposed the rightful worship of the true God as it had been established in Jerusalem from the time of King David. What is more, the youth of the area were openly disrespectful of Elisha. It is very possible that there is more to this. Elisha, who, as we heard, was wearing the mantle of Elijah, was probably recognized by them as the successor to Elijah, the so-called ‘troubler of Israel.’ After all, Elijah had spent much time going between the capital Samaria and the religious site of Bethel, decrying both unfaithful kings and priests. Elijah with his mantle would have been a well-recognized sight, not terribly unlike that of pastors in our day with their distinctive clerical collars. In any case these disrespectful if not openly-antagonistic-to-God boys were attacked and mauled by bears.

What do these two stories tell us? Again, if we understand Israel of this time to be a picture of spiritual reality, those parts that trusted the word of God and His prophet, who believed the promises God had given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were blessed and those who didn’t were cursed. Or to put it in a more familiar way, God speaks to us through both law and gospel, as indeed He did in Elisha’s day.

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There are, as we said before, two lessons to learn from this. First that the ministry of reconciliation continues, even as preachers die and are replaced, Moses by Joshua, Elijah by Elisha, prophet after prophet in the Old Testament, preacher after preacher in the New Testament. From the beginning of man’s fall into sin, God has spoken to His people of mercy and forgiveness. He will never leave us as orphans, but speaks to us as Our Father, who so loved the world that He gave His only Son. In this nothing has changed, as we should expect from Him who once said to Israel, “I the LORD do not change. Therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.” (Malachi 3:6)

Second, God has prepared for His trusting children a home, an eternal home, where He has prepared for us everything – everything! – He has promised. There Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob await us. There Moses and Elijah, David and Josiah, Isaiah and all the prophets wait to receive us. There Peter, James, and John, who marveled at what was revealed to them in seeing Moses and Elijah conversing with Jesus, our Savior, wait for us to join them. Amen.

**Soli Deo Gloria**