

Text: 2 Kings 4:17–36

¹⁷ The woman became pregnant, and the next year about that same time she gave birth to a son, just as Elisha had told her. ¹⁸ The child grew, and one day he went out to his father, who was with the reapers. ¹⁹ “My head! My head!” he said to his father. His father told a servant, “Carry him to his mother.” ²⁰ After the servant had lifted him up and carried him to his mother, the boy sat on her lap until noon, and then he died. ²¹ She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, then shut the door and went out. ²² She called her husband and said, “Please send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can go to the man of God quickly and return.” ²³ “Why go to him today?” he asked. “It’s not the New Moon or the Sabbath.” “It’s all right,” she said. ²⁴ She saddled the donkey and said to her servant, “Lead on; don’t slow down for me unless I tell you.” ²⁵ So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel. When he saw her in the distance, the man of God said to his servant Gehazi, “Look! There’s the Shunammite!” ²⁶ Run to meet her and ask her, ‘Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is your child all right?’ ” “Everything is all right,” she said. ²⁷ When she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but the man of God said, “Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, but the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me why.” ²⁸ “Did I ask you for a son, my lord?” she said. “Didn’t I tell you, ‘Don’t raise my hopes?’” ²⁹ Elisha said to Gehazi, “Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy’s face.” ³⁰ But the child’s mother said, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So he got up and followed her. ³¹ Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the boy’s face, but there was no sound or response. So Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and told him, “The boy has not awakened.” ³² When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. ³³ He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the LORD. ³⁴ Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy’s body grew warm. ³⁵ Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. ³⁶ Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, “Call the Shunammite.” And he did. When she came, he said, “Take your son.” ³⁷ She came in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out. – NIV84

Prayer of the Day:

Eternal God and Father, help us to remember Jesus, who obeyed Your will and bore the cross for our salvation that through His anguish, pain, and death, we may receive forgiveness of sins and inherit eternal life; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen!

Verse of the Day: Mark 10:45

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Sermon Text:

It’s a heart-wrenching history lesson. One made only more gut-wrenching when we hear the back story. Elisha one of the great Old Testament Prophets was making his rounds. The wicked King Joram had succeeded his father Ahab and had a summer palace in Jezreel, not far from Shunem. This would make it a regular route for Elisha to travel and there was Shunamite woman there who opened her home to the prophet and fed him and his servant Gehazi when they passed through. She and her husband even built a room on the roof for them to stay when they arrived tired and worn out from their journeys.

One day Elisha, so appreciative of what this woman had done for them, sought to offer some favor in return. She is a wonderful example of Godly Stewardship, for even when offered something in return for her hospitality she refused, content to live among her people and with the life, her Lord had given. But Gehazi noticed their predicament, the couple had born no son and the husband was old. This would leave the Shunamite woman in a predicament when her husband passed without an heir to inherit the estate. So Elisha called her in and informed her that she and her husband would bare a son by the next summer when Elisha returned. She does and that's where our lesson began. No doubt wrapped in the joy of this birth, this gift given.

The boy grew to an age where he would have been running out to his father, perhaps beginning to learn about the work of the fields (many commentators place the boy around 8 years old). He complains of a severe headache and his father has him carried home to mom. Any number of things could have occurred here, from heatstroke to a tumor but after spending the remainder of the morning with his mother, he dies in her lap.

Ah, death, it really doesn't matter when it happens or how it happens, it is always a gut punch because it was not supposed to happen. God would have had us in the garden eating from the tree of life and perfectly free of this foe. In our sin, we knew better. So now death touches everyone from the oldest of us to the very youngest. And now grief, grief filled with hope becomes the rest of our lesson.

Our grieving mother doesn't hesitate, the one who had been able to persuade God to give this gift will be able to persuade God to give it back. Some would tell us that the Father's confusion over why she would want to go see the man of God shows us that he was an unbeliever or at best a very immature believer so the Shunnamite woman doesn't run to him but to Elisha. Maybe, but then grief is a crazy thing and in it she is bent on only one thing, the restoration of her son. All will be fine! Everything will be fine if she can just get to him! I'm not so sure if my wife came flying out of the house begging to go to church on some random day that I wouldn't ask why? And I'm a pastor. Anyway, away she goes.

Upon arrival, we see something similar with Gehazi who asks what is wrong. Again, everything is all right, even though it is not, I just need to get to Elisha. For me the whole account just drips with this mother's grief, which bursts forth as she lays hold of the man of God who can see the distress all over her, *"Did I ask you for a son, my lord?" she said. "Didn't I tell you, 'Don't raise my hopes'?"* Who of us wouldn't do the same? Hasn't done the same when presented with death.

Gehazi is dispatched immediately but the woman persists that Elisha himself must come so he does. Mount Carmel is about 19 miles from Shunem so Google tells me Gehazi must be in pretty good shape he gets there first to no avail and returns to Elisha and the woman in route. Now Elisha enters the room and prays, stretches himself out over the boy, paces (no doubt in prayer again) and once more stretches himself out over the boy and then ... sneezes! Life!! Life snatched back from Death!!! Wow!!! What a lesson! One of 10 times where we hear that death gives up the dead in the Bible.

So ... what does this mean? Have we been missing the mark at our funeral services and Pastor Ehlert and I should be sprawling out over the caskets to bring the dead back to life? Live a good enough life, and build a traveling home for your pastors and God will drive away all the bad and evil from you? No, eventually the Shunammite and the son will die again. So will Elisha who will not enter the heavens untouched by death as did his predecessor. Well, then what does any of this say to us? Simply this, Life can be snatched back from death ... has been snatched back from that most terrible foe. And knowing that makes the words of our Shunnamite woman spring to life.

Notice those really weird words recorded for us again. She tells her husband, "It's all right." Even when we would say it is far from it. She tells Gehazi, "Everything is all right." Even after he asks specifically about the son, who is definitely dead. Even though she is definitely not alright. Each time the Hebrew uses put one word "Shalom". We have talked about it before in sermons. It usually is translated "peace". She had this overwhelming confidence that even in the face of death. It would really be okay. It could be made okay. There could be peace. And so there is.

But it doesn't come from Elisha, it comes from the One he served. Jesus once said, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*" (John 14:27)" Do you know when those words were spoken? As the disciples made their way to the Garden of Gethsemane. On the journey to His betrayal and death where He would conquer sin, satan, and hell once for all. When He would send even death away in defeat in the empty tomb of Easter morning. Yes, Christ stretches Himself out upon the cross, stretches Himself out over the countless bodies of all who have been touched by sin and grief and death and He will, He has snatched life back from its ugly grasp.

He comes into our lives when we have faced the heart-wrenching blow with far more than nice-sounding words or waning memories. But his promise that it will all be all right, is actually all all right. Why? Because death will never claim the child of God. Through death, we open our eyes to the eternal joys of heaven. In death, our souls are reunited with all the saints who have gone before us and all those who will come after. Because of Jesus, death has become little more than a sleep from which we awaken to the unfathomable joys which He has won.

Oh, and one day, one day the voice of the Son of God will be heard again. And when He speaks the dead will rise. Like Lazarus in our Gospel lesson, they will listen and come out. Like the young boy, we will open our eyes (I don't know if we will sneeze or not) but bodies will reunited with souls. There on that last and final day, there will be no denial of the truth. Life has been snatched back from death at the cross. Peace, real peace has been restored to God's people through Christ who alone has purchased and won it for us.

Your heart goes out to the Shunnamite woman, doesn't it? The grief is real, raw, unmistakable. So it is every time death makes its way into our lives. Make no mistake, "*the soul who sins is the one who will die*" (Ezekiel 18:20)." But just as unmistakable is the truth Paul trumpets to the Corinthians, "*Death has been swallowed up in victory.*" "*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?*" *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* (1 Corinthians 15:54–57)"

Today, even as the season of Lent begins to draw to its close, we are given a glimpse of the victory. Another proof that there is one who holds power even over the foe of death. And one who can snatch life, victory, from its terrible jaws. Yes, dear friends, "*Christ Jesus, has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*" (2 Timothy 1:10)" Thanks be to God Amen!!