

May 3, 2015
B.C.
Elisha's Bones
2 Kings 13:20-21

Opening words: Did you know that within the Bible there are nine resurrection stories? Including Jesus, six are found in the New Testament. Jesus resurrected three: the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:13-15), Jairus' daughter (Matthew 9:25) and Lazarus (John 11:43-44). Peter resurrected Tabitha (Acts 9:36-42) and Paul raised Eutychus (Acts 20:9-12). That leaves three in the Old Testament. It is those three resurrections I'm looking at in my newest sermon series, *B.C.*

We conclude this sermon series in Second Kings, the story of Elisha's bones. In order for the story to make sense, you need to know about how burial practices have changed. In our time and place, our cemeteries are filled with private graves. Everyone has their own grave, casket and vault. Arlington National Cemetery is a classic example. That is not the story in Old Testament times. I know this is hard to hear, but in their time the deceased were buried with others who had passed. Everyone was placed into a common cave. The smell must have been potent, so a large stone had to be rolled in front of the opening to contain the stench. The job of placing the corpse in the cave must have been the worst job on the economic totem pole. With that understanding, let us hear this morning's text, 2 Kings 13:20-21.

2 Kings 13:20-21

Elisha died and was buried.

Now Moabite raiders used to enter the country every spring. ²¹ Once while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so they threw the man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet.

I love this story. Did you know the White House was wired for electricity in 1891? However, it was not necessarily welcomed by the sitting President or his wife, Benjamin and Caroline Harrison. They refused to touch the light switches because they were afraid of getting shocked. It was rumored they slept with the the lights on when no one else was around to turn the lights off. They preferred the old oil lantern system. (Open flames are much safer than electricity.) Fear makes us do funny things. What frightens you? General George Patton once said, "*I never take counsel from my fears.*"

There are no shortage of fears in our society. Maybe you have one of these. This list came from a website called "selfhelpconcepts.com."

1. Fear of flying
2. Fear of public speaking
3. Fear of heights

4. Fear of the dark
5. Fear of intimacy
6. Fear of flowers
7. Fear of driving
8. Fear of snakes
9. Fear of needles
10. Fear of spiders
11. Fear of dogs

Does anyone here fear the future? Within our area there is a United Methodist congregation, which has experienced resurrection. Ten years ago, I thought the church was near the end. The numbers, attendance and offerings, did not look good. Then everything suddenly changed. The old pastor was sent away and a new pastor came. Well, not a new pastor, a new retired pastor. He did things the old way. He talked about Jesus and he loved his people. In our time that is kind of radical, but it worked. The church responded and has rebounded to its past glory. However, I have to say this. The congregation is worried about their future. The reason is, their pastor is aging and his health is failing. They are afraid he is going to leave. They are afraid that when he leaves the good times will end. They are afraid their church will return to its sickly state. That church is afraid of the future. Does anyone here fear the future?

Does anyone here fear aging? As I told you last week, I had my hernia surgery the day after Easter. I haven't heard too many hernia stories, but some have asked me how long I have had it. I really don't know. It was discovered at my annual physical. When my doctor told me I had a hernia, I was a little surprised. I asked him, "How could I have a hernia. My work is not physical. I don't lift or dig anything of any weight." He looked into my chart and said, "At your age, you shouldn't be surprised you have a hernia." I was speechless. What did he mean, "at my age"? I really don't feel any older, but I had to admit my human limitations. Aging bothers us because it means we are closer to death. Does anyone here fear aging?

Does anyone here fear illness or disease? Every day, I take my dog, Macy, for a walk. I walk around the block and call people. One of the people I call daily is 87 years old. She is one of my favorite people in the world because she has such a great attitude. She has been stuck at home for months. She always wants to know how I fill my day. I really don't care if she is 87 years old, but she does. The other day, she said, "When you are my age, every cough or pain bothers you because it may be a sign of something much more serious." I haven't got to that point yet in life, but I think she has a point. Does anyone here fear illness or disease?

Does anyone here fear for their own security? Back in November of 2013, I preached a sermon called "Friday Night at Mollenkopf." On that Sunday morning, I talked about sitting in Mollenkopf Stadium. It is the high school football stadium in Warren. I have been going to games there since 1967. Generally, I go alone. It is where I go to escape

all my responsibilities and ponder my life. Ironically, on the weekend I wrote that sermon, the game was cancelled due to the violence within the city of Warren. This is the truth. I haven't been back since; I am not sure I will ever go back. I have seen too many news stories from my hometown. I don't think I will go back because I don't feel safe. The Warren I knew is gone. Are there places you just won't go because you don't feel safe? Does anyone here fear for your own security? What frightens you?

The Moabite raiders frightened the Israelites in the scripture lesson for this morning. The scripture lesson is easier to memorize than it is to understand. According to the text it was springtime. We look forward to spring because we have grown tired of the harsh winter weather. In their time and place, they must have dreaded the spring. For it was during the spring that the Moabite raiders came. (The Moabites were mountainous people in that region of the world.) They did not come for a social visit, they came for military action. Their unannounced raids brought death and destruction. The Israelites were preoccupied every spring with these unwanted visitors. Their arrival meant the end of their normal activities.

That is what happened in the text. Someone had died and they were placing the body in the community tomb. Normally, the body was treated with respect. When the raiders suddenly appeared, the normal activity of treating the dead with respect was disrupted. According to verse 21, the frightened Israelites threw the corpse in the tomb so the living could flee for safety. This is where the story takes an unusual turn. We do not know the identity of the deceased, but it is safe to say he was the luckiest person in the region. He was thrown into the same tomb that held the remains of Elisha. According to verse 20, Elisha had been gone for more than sixty years. There was nothing left of the old prophet but his bones. However, his bones were enough. When the corpse of the recently dead man hit the bones of Elisha, the man was resurrected. It is an odd story but it does demonstrate for us the power of God. Listen to this next line. The Israelites were afraid, but God was with them the whole time. That is our story. We have our fears, but God is with us; we really have nothing to fear. If you believe in a great big God, say, "**Amen!**"

As we come to the communion table, I would encourage you to do two things. First, admit your fears. It is all part of the human experience. Second, I would encourage you to look for God. With God all things are possible. Every day, we play the part of the Israelites. We have grown blind to God, who is in our very midst. Do you spend more time looking for God, or examining your human limitations?

One of the great stories in the Bible is the rich young ruler. It is found in all three of the synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. You know the story. I have referred to it many times over the years. It seemed like he had everything. He was rich, so he could buy what he desired. He was young, so he had a future. He was a ruler, so he had influence. The only thing he lacked was salvation. He went to Jesus to ask him a question that had been eating away at his soul, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

It is an excellent question. The Master answered, "Sell everything and give your money to the poor. Then, follow me." The rich young ruler didn't like the answer. He left upset because he couldn't do it. Jesus says, money is more of a curse to your soul than a blessing. It is harder for a rich man to get into heaven than it is for a camel to get through the eye of a needle. Then, Jesus reminds us of the power of God. He said, "With God, all things are possible." We have nothing to fear because with God all things are possible. If you believe all things with God are possible, say, "**Amen!**" Then why are you afraid?

One of the great names in western civilization history is Napoleon Bonaparte. As a French military and political leader, he dominated European affairs for nearly two decades. He feared nothing, except one thing, cats. He wasn't alone. Hitler, Mussolini and Julius Caesar also feared cats! What frightens you? Do not be afraid. With God all things are possible.

Will you pray with me?