

Sermon for May 5, 2013 – Easter 6

2 Kings 6:15-17

Theme: **“O Lord, open our eyes that we may see!”**

- 1) We often feel alone and afraid.
- 2) Reassure us of your protection and presence.

¹⁵ *When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked. ¹⁶ "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." ¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.*

Why don't we courageously witness Christ – unfazed by what people might think or do to us? Why don't we commit bold acts of love– like inviting a stranger or homeless person to stay in our guest bed? Why don't we give selflessly to charity – unafraid of losing that which we have saved up for our future comforts? I can point out many Scripture passages that encourage us to be bold in our love and faith, so why aren't we?

In a word: fear. We are afraid of witnessing Christ boldly – lest our friends and family get upset and disown us. We are afraid of inviting a stranger into our home, lest he steals or, worse yet, does us bodily harm. We are afraid of giving too much money to charity, lest something happen to us and we don't have enough savings to cover the emergency.

These fears all have something in common: the idea that it's up to us provide for and protect ourselves. But is it really all up to us? Does the Lord leave us alone on this earth to face every problem by ourselves? No. Before His ascension, Jesus said: *"Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matthews 28:20) Our Gospel lesson records Jesus promising us the Holy Spirit to be our Counselor and Helper throughout life. We certainly do not face life alone. God is with us.

Oh, that we would see the spiritual reality of how guarded by God we are! I am certain that if we were to see the truth, we would live our lives differently than we do. So we pray: **“O Lord, open our eyes that we may see!”** 1) *We often feel alone and afraid.* 2) *Reassure us of your protection and presence.*

Part One: We often feel alone and afraid

Our sermon text allows us to catch a glimpse of the unseen spiritual truth that surrounds us: we are not alone. But before we get to it, let us consider the context.

Aram was at war with Israel and was secretly moving troops around to attack Israel. The LORD allowed Elisha to see and know where the armies of Aram were headed. Elisha warned Israel's king so that he could move his troops ahead of the king of Aram. This happened again and again.

The king of Aram was convinced that there was a traitor amongst his men, but a servant told him that this was not the work of a spy, but of Elisha the prophet. The king of Aram sent a very strong force of chariots and horsemen to surround the city of Dothan and capture Elisha. And this is where our text breaks in.

¹⁵ *When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked.*

What a shock! What were they to do? They were all alone. They were just doing what God commanded them to do, they were doing the right thing in warning Israel, and now look: they are surrounded by the enemy! The servant was desperate.

Have you ever felt like this: alone, afraid and wondering why God abandoned you? If we are honest with ourselves, the answer is "yes," isn't it? Think of the thunderstorm or noise in the middle of the night that left you on edge. Think about the broken relationships or financial problems you had to face. Think of the illness or death of a loved one. Think of the temptation and spiritual struggles inside of you to doubt God, to fall into sin, to abandon your trust in him. . . In all these things we feel so alone. The world surrounds us together with our sinful flesh and hell's angels. They have come to capture us - to bring us under the authority of the devil. When we think about these things, we are like Elisha's servant. We feel so alone. What are we going to do?

¹⁶ *"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered.*

But wait a second, how could Elisha say this? An army was camped outside his house looking for him! Could you imagine a gang of armed men surrounding your house, and your spouse telling you not to be afraid? What gave Elisha such confidence?

"Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

Elisha trusted God's promise to take care of him. No, Elisha did not see the protection of God – at least there is no indication that he did. Rather He trusted God's Word, which promised: ⁷ *The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.* (Psalm 34:7)

There is an army camped outside our door – the devil, world and our own sinful nature. There is so much tragedy and danger, and yet we have no reason to be afraid. Why not? Because God promises to be near us – as the Psalmist says: *God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.* ² *Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea . . .* ⁷ *The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.* (Psalm 46:1-2,7)

Part Two: Reassure us of your protection and presence.

Elisha was confident in the LORD. His servant was not. So what did Elisha do? *Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.*

God opened the eyes of the servant to see the spiritual reality: the hills were full of fiery holy angels ready to protect Elisha. It is interesting to note that we are not told that Elisha saw this sight, but only that his servant saw it. Now, why is that? Is it because Elisha was clairvoyant, and always saw the spiritual realm? No, absolutely not. I am convinced, rather, that Elisha had no need to see the angels, nor receive prophetic revelation that they were present. He knew they were there from God's Word – the word which says: ⁹ *If you make the Most High your dwelling-- even the LORD, who is my refuge--* ¹⁰ *then no harm will befall*

you, no disaster will come near your tent. ¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; (Psalms 91:9-11)

To Elisha – the man of faith – God’s awesome protection was self-evident. Is it to us? Oh, how weak in faith are we! Like Elisha’s servant we only see the problems. We feel alone. We cry out for answers, but the truth is right in front of us. It is in the Bible. We don’t need to see God to know that He is there. We have his promise in Scripture. And if we have his promise, that is all we need. Those same angels that camped around Elisha, are watching over us. The same God who loved Elisha loves us as well.

But we might be tempted to question: “How do I know this? I mean it is obvious that God loved Elisha, but how do I know that He loves me? I don’t deserve to be loved by God like Elisha – the man of God.” Well, let me let you in on an important truth: Elisha did not deserve to be loved by God either. Elisha was a sinner just like you and me. There was nothing special about Elisha - in and of himself. What made Elisha special was God’s grace, forgiveness and salvation which covered him through faith. Elisha believed in God’s promised Messiah, and this faith was credited to him as righteousness.

The same is true for us. We are saved the same way Elisha was saved. We have the same status before God as He did. We are saved by grace, through faith. It is through faith that we become children of God.

Think back to your baptisms. Do you remember learning what happened at that time? God washed away all your sins and put his name on you. He sent you the Holy Spirit to mark you as his redeemed child. Because of Christ’s work of saving us, whenever God the Father looks at you, He sees his Son who saved you. You are covered with Christ – just like Elisha. Through faith you are God’s dearly loved child.

Now let me ask you a question: what king allows his child to be captured by an enemy? I know of none. And neither does God. Kings love their sons and protect them. They send armies to guard and watch over them. If this is true regarding earthly kings, then it is certainly true in regard to God. God loves us. He has adopted us into his family. He is very zealous for us, and this is why he sends out his army – His holy angels – to camp around and protect us.

“But if this is true,” someone might say, “How come I still feel the heat of battle? How come I still feel like I am in danger? Why does God allow all this trouble?” Well, just as any good King allows his son to train and go to war, so also the LORD allows us to train and go to war. He knows that this is for our good. But He is still there to protect us. He will not let things get out of control. He is with us and never will forsake us.

So let me ask you again: why are we so afraid? It’s because we don’t trust God as we ought. “Lord forgive our cowardly, lack of faith in you. Open our eyes that we may see your promises and believe them. Dear God, you have said; *“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”* Help us reply in confidence, *“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”* (Hebrews 13:5-6) and having confessed this truth, help us live boldly to the glory of your name – trusting in your salvation. Amen.