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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH
SEPTEMBER 1, 2007
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA
PASTOR MARK FRY

1 PASTOR MARK FRY: We have a Bible story today that's
2 an amazing story, they all are, aren't they, but hopefully
3 there is something in here that talks a little bit about how
4 to live life and how to die death.

5 Before that, though, would you pray for me just a
6 moment that I might have some helpful things to say.

7 I just had the honor of two saints praying for me.
8 If you would do that, I would appreciate that.

9 It doesn't have to be real elaborate, but if you
10 could just ask God to reach into his storehouse of heaven and
11 give me something that might be helpful I would appreciate
12 it.

13 Thank you.

14 We are going to look at a passage from 2 Kings
15 Chapter 13.

16 It's a little early in the morning to find that book
17 in the Bible, but we are going to get to that.

18 It's on page 350 in some of the Bibles and in some
19 of the other Bibles it will be a little earlier on.

20 Please grab a Bible. I want to use this with you
21 today.

22 It's a fascinating passage. Let's look at this
23 story together.

24 What I want you to do is I want you to mark that
25 13th Chapter and then I want you to come back with me to the

1 1st Chapter of 2 Kings and then we are going to get to where
2 we need to be, because what we need to see here is we need to
3 see a recap.

4 A text taken out of context is a con oftentimes, and
5 I know a whole lot of people that like to just pull a verse
6 out and whack me over the head with it and I'm like, whoa,
7 where did that come from?

8 That doesn't really fit with the understanding of
9 that text, so we need to be alerted to that.

10 But let's look at 2 Kings. Here is the deal.
11 Elijah is going to die.

12 Actually he's not going to die, so there is a little
13 bit of a misprint on our screen there, and Elisha is going to
14 take over.

15 We see this in the 2nd Chapter of 2 Kings beginning
16 at the 9th verse.

17 "When they had crossed," that means go across the
18 Jordan River, "Elijah said to Elisha, 'Tell me what I may do
19 for you before I am taken from you.'

20 "Elisha said, 'Please let me inherit a double share
21 of your spirit.'

22 "He responded, 'You have asked a hard thing, yet, if
23 you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted
24 you; if not, it will not.'

25 "As they continued walking and talking a chariot of

1 fire and horses of fire separated the two of them and Elijah
2 ascended in a whirlwind into heaven.

3 "Elisha kept watching and crying out, 'Father,
4 father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen.'

5 "But when he could no longer see him and he grasped
6 his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.'"

7 He had prayed this difficult prayer to Elijah,
8 Elijah is like anything I can do for you before I go?

9 It was great, the 7:45 people were arriving this
10 morning, and I got permission from Phil to quote him on this,
11 he's coming in, I don't know how old Phil is, probably 80,
12 great guy, World War II veteran.

13 And he said, "Boy, we have been doing some funeral
14 planning. I don't know if I have enough money to die."

15 I said, "Phil maybe you're going to be like the
16 other two biblical people who never had to die. Do you
17 remember who they are?

18 He "Oh, yes, you told us a couple weeks ago, Enoch,
19 Genesis 5, and Elijah."

20 And I said, "We'll pray for you and then it will be
21 Phil, the third that won't die."

22 He laughed about that and I said, "It's great.
23 We're talking about that text today."

24 But notice Elisha's request is. I have been
25 watching you and I really like the way you live life. I

1 would like a double share of your spirit.

2 And Elijah is like, I don't know, that's tough, but
3 if God lets you see me being taken into heaven, then consider
4 it granted, and he does. He sees him go.

5 And so what we have been talking about a little bit
6 this summer are some of those wonderful miracle stories of
7 Elisha.

8 He literally will perform twice as many miracles as
9 Elijah.

10 And we don't have time to number all of them. We
11 could turn the page and we'll see a couple of them in
12 Chapter 4.

13 We preached on this one week. This is which Elisha
14 raises a kid to new life and in the 4th Chapter, Verse 34.

15 "Then he got up on the bed and lay upon the child,
16 putting his mouth upon his mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, and
17 his hands upon his hands."

18 What happens is the kid is raised to new life, and
19 Elijah had also raised a kid to new life, so Elisha is doing
20 that.

21 We see in the 5th Chapter there is this fascinating
22 story that Pastor Wenda preached on about Naaman, who has
23 leprosy.

24 Naaman is told by Elisha, if you want to get healed,
25 go to the Jordan River and dip in it seven times.

1 He reluctantly does that and he's cleansed of his
2 leprosy.

3 So he's raising people from the dead, he's cleansing
4 people.

5 We see in the 5th Chapter some of this stuff that is
6 happening. He was angry. He wouldn't do anything.

7 In the 6th chapter there is a fascinating story that
8 we did not preach on.

9 One of my favorite lines in the Bible is 2 Kings 6,
10 Verse 5. This is fantastic.

11 "But as one was felling a log, his ax head fell into
12 the water and he cried out, 'Alas, master. It was
13 borrowed.'"

14 Iron was a very precious commodity in these days and
15 this guy has this ax head that falls into the river.

16 But it's not a problem for Elisha because he defies
17 gravity and through the gift of magnetism of the Holy Spirit
18 the ax head floats to the top of the river and he puts it
19 back on the handle.

20 Isn't that fantastic? But the point being Elisha is
21 really after it.

22 He's doing all this really cool stuff. In the 6th
23 Chapter that happens.

24 There's these wonderful stories. The ax head starts
25 to float. We looked at some of those other ones.

1 He cleanses. He raises the girl back to life.

2 There's this unending supply of oil.

3 All of these prayerful, powerful leadership examples
4 of Elisha. He's got the double portion.

5 And now we enter the story you see in the 13th
6 Chapter as his life is winding down, and let's see if maybe,
7 just maybe, God can not only show us how to live life, but
8 die death.

9 Because, remember, Elijah ascended into heaven in a
10 whirlwind, let's see how Elisha dies.

11 A lot of us have never maybe seen how he dies. It's
12 an amazing story.

13 We are in the 13th Chapter, 2 Kings 13, I'm jumping
14 in at Verse 14.

15 "Now when Elisha had fallen sick with the illness of
16 which he was to die," he's on his deathbed, "King Joash of
17 Israel went down to him and wept before him crying, 'My
18 father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen.'

19 "Elisha said to him, 'Take a bow and arrows,' so he
20 took a bow and arrows.

21 "Then he said to the king of Israel, 'Draw the bow'
22 and he drew it.

23 "Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands. Then he
24 said, 'Open the window eastward,' and he opened it.

25 "Elisha said, 'Shoot,' and he shot.

1 "Then he said, 'The Lord's arrow of victory, the
2 arrow of victory over Aram. For you shall fight the Arameans
3 in Aphek until you have made an end of them.'

4 "He continued, 'Take the arrows,' and he took them.
5 He said to the king of Israel, 'Strike the ground with them.'
6 He struck three times and stopped.'

7 "Then the man of God was angry with him and said,
8 'You should have struck five or six times, then you would
9 have struck down Aram until you had made an end of it, but
10 now you will strike down Aram only three times.'

11 "So Elisha died and they buried him. Now bands of
12 Moabites used to invade the land in the spring of the year.

13 "As a man was being buried, a marauding band was
14 seen and the man was thrown into the grave of Elisha.

15 "As soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he
16 came to life and stood on his feet."

17 Isn't that fantastic? It's a beautiful story. Now
18 we have to go back and we have to unwrap it a little bit.
19 Look at Verse 14.

20 "When Elisha had fallen sick with the illness of
21 which he was to die," he's on his deathbed, and we need to
22 see, this other character is King Joash, and his name is
23 spelled two different ways, it has an H in there sometimes,
24 but not always.

25 But you need to know this about Joash. He's the

1 king of Israel and he's a knucklehead. Can you remember
2 that? He's a knucklehead.

3 He was the king of Israel, but if we had the time we
4 would look back and see he did what was evil in the sight of
5 the Lord.

6 But, you see, what is happening is Elisha is on his
7 deathbed and so the king of Israel is going to be there.

8 And I don't know about you, but I know that about
9 some people, when somebody dies, sometimes everybody comes a
10 running.

11 They have not really been involved with life, but
12 they come when it's the deathbed experience time.

13 That's a little bit of what Joash is doing, but we
14 need to give him a little bit of the benefit of the doubt.

15 "King Joash of Israel went down to him and wept
16 before him crying, 'My father, my father, the chariots of
17 Israel and its horsemen.'"

18 He knows the time has come. That's a biblical
19 understanding, swing low, sweet chariot, they are coming
20 forth to carry me home.

21 And so he's king of Israel, he's there, and his
22 grief is real. He weeps and he calls him his father.

23 This is not like, hey, I'm glad this guy is dying.
24 There is intensity here. There is respect here.

25 Elisha is on his death bed, but what we are going to

1 see is he's actually ministering to Joash while he's dying.

2 And I don't know about you, but I know a lot of
3 people that that's their experience.

4 They go around somebody when they're dying and they
5 come back and they go, "This was the strangest thing, I went
6 to take care of them and they cared for me."

7 This is what is going to happen, and we need to see
8 how, but it has some twists to it.

9 This is after he says, "My father, my father, the
10 chariots of Israel and its horsemen."

11 "Elisha said to him, 'Take a bow and arrows,' so he
12 took a bow and arrows."

13 Joash is very obedient. He does exactly what he's
14 told.

15 "Then he said to the king of Israel, 'Draw the bow'
16 and he drew it.

17 "Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands."

18 Isn't it amazing? He's using the gift of physical
19 touch even from his own deathbed. He's touching the other
20 guy.

21 And I know some people when they are around death
22 they are like I don't want to touch.

23 But we have to see that's a good thing. Touch. It
24 heals. It's a good thing. It goes both ways, you see, this
25 healing touch.

1 "Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands. Then he
2 said, 'Open the window eastward' and he opened it.

3 "Elisha said, 'Shoot,' and he shot.

4 "Then he said, 'The Lord's arrow of victory, the
5 arrow of victory over Aram. For you shall fight the Arameans
6 in Aphek until you have made an end of them.'"

7 Notice Elisha. He is encouraging to the bitter end.
8 He's like way to go, you hit the window, you hit the target.

9 And then he goes that's a good sign. That means
10 you're going to win. We are going to win the war, and so he
11 continues.

12 "He continued, 'Take the arrows,' and he took them.
13 He said to the king of Israel, 'Strike the ground with them.'
14 He struck three times and stopped."

15 This is what he did. He takes these arrows, and I
16 was looking back stage for arrows and we didn't have any, so
17 I have this thing here.

18 I think here is what Joash does. He takes the arrow
19 and he taps lightly like this.

20 And it's interesting, he did exactly what he's told,
21 didn't he?

22 He said strike the ground with them. He struck
23 three times and then he stopped.

24 "Then the man of God," that would be Elisha, "was
25 angry with him and said, 'You should have struck five or six

1 times, then you would have struck down Aram until you had
2 made an end of it, but now you will strike down Aram only
3 three times."

4 Isn't that interesting? Strike the ground. For
5 some reason lightly tapping makes Elisha angry.

6 I don't know. It's kind of weird, isn't it? Here
7 is my point in it.

8 Sometimes we hold back. Oftentimes we hold back.
9 And sometimes we hold back in a myriad of ways, we just give
10 a little bit, but there's a default mechanism that some of us
11 seem to have, and I believe it's of the enemy, of I'm fine,
12 kind of a little tap when we knock at the door, it's just
13 kind of a little tap.

14 But what Elisha seems to be saying to Joash is, it's
15 through anger, he said you should have struck five or six
16 times.

17 I suspect he should have been a little bit more like
18 aggressive like this, instead of lightly tapping.

19 It's interesting, because I was preaching this
20 sermon in the chapel at 7:45, and I didn't have my arrow, so
21 I did it on the table, the altar, kind of went like this
22 lightly, and then I did it like this hard, and everybody in
23 there woke up.

24 And I was like, "I like Jesus meek and mild, but
25 there's times he gets mad, and maybe this is one of those

1 times.

2 It's interesting, I did it a couple times for
3 effect, and I was coming out greeting everybody afterwards
4 and somebody goes, "I thought the meek will inherit the
5 earth."

6 And you know what I said to them? "This is a story
7 about warfare, and you as a World War II vet know about
8 warfare, don't you. Did France win the war?"

9 "Oh, thank you for that clarification."

10 That's what Elisha is teaching us. You see, at the
11 moment of death, a lot of us just sort of hold back, and
12 maybe there is a point when we just need to take seriously
13 what God is saying.

14 Strike the ground hard; not just tap lightly.

15 We have a God of abundance; not a God of scarcity,
16 and that sometimes is just something we need to do, because
17 Elisha gets angry at partial obedience.

18 And when are we going to put God to the task of that
19 and get out some of that anger.

20 We used to be better at it when we worked in the
21 fields and we threw bales of hay and we had more jobs where
22 we weren't just watching on TV, or passive participants in
23 the game of life, but the most anger we get now is when that
24 Swift guy drops one of Keller's passes.

25 It's like we get a foam pillow and throw it at the

1 TV.

2 But what we are talking about here is righteous
3 anger, and Elisha is a good teacher for that.

4 In other words, I think what he's saying is, how
5 does the Bible interpret meekness?

6 Well, Jesus says this way, when they ask him how
7 many times should I forgive my neighbor, he doesn't say just
8 do it three times. He says 70 times 7. It takes a lot at
9 times.

10 Hesitancy, reluctance, being tentative with our
11 faith.

12 You know my acronym, I'm fine, Fouled up, Insecure,
13 Neurotic and Emotional.

14 That's usually what we do with God, isn't it? How
15 are you doing?

16 I'm fine, when maybe we are not so fine around
17 death.

18 In fact, when we strike the ground hard like this,
19 it's okay.

20 In fact, it's encouraged, or it's going to become
21 cancerous, toxic. Excretion is a sign of life, and I think
22 Terri taught us that.

23 It's okay to be mad. A lot of us knew Terri, a lot
24 of us didn't, but it's interesting, the story here continues.
25 Let's continue to look at this fascinating sorry.

1 "So Elisha died," I love the Bible, after something
2 incredible has happened, they just kind of slip in this, it's
3 like, okay, we are going on, "So Elisha died."

4 What happened to the other thing. I kind of like
5 the other part we just came from. Well, let's see what
6 happened.

7 "So Elisha died and they buried him. Now bands of
8 Moabites used to invade the land in the spring of the year.

9 "As a man was being buried, a marauding band was
10 seen and the man was thrown into the grave of Elisha.

11 "As soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he
12 came to life and stood on his feet."

13 Here is the deal. Even in death Elisha is raising
14 people to new life.

15 Isn't that amazing? Here is what you need to know
16 about that now.

17 The bands of Moabites, those are the bad guys, and
18 one thing that they are going to do is they are going to come
19 through town and if they find any dead bodies they are going
20 to desecrate them.

21 That's the way it happens in warfare. Remember this
22 when Mussolini died in World War II.

23 You remember this when some of journalists were
24 killed in Iraq, the thing for some people to do is to take a
25 dead body and make an example of it, we'll hang it on a lamp

1 pole and we'll bash it with a stick to get some of our anger
2 out.

3 The Israelites know this about the Moabites, and so
4 one of the Israelites has died and they don't want that to
5 happen.

6 So they take the man and they throw him into
7 Elisha's tomb to hide him.

8 And Elisha did not only raise people to life in his
9 life, but he does it in death.

10 Isn't that great? I want people to say that about
11 me. I don't know about you.

12 After I'm dead, I hope there is something about my
13 life that gives hope and purpose to someone else and raises
14 them to new life.

15 You see, Elisha teaches us how to live, double share
16 of the spirit; how to die, same double share.

17 And after we're dead and buried, wouldn't it be cool
18 if people actually come to faith as a result of that.

19 Let's make some conclusions and make some
20 challenges. We have been challenged this week.

21 Terri died on Monday of this week past, and I know a
22 lot of us maybe didn't know her, or there is also this
23 interesting thing that happens now, I didn't know she was
24 that sick kind of thing.

25 We didn't really fully comprehend, and there was

1 just this intercession that happened that was beyond
2 everything.

3 But she was 48, we loved her, she kind of did this
4 abundance thing.

5 Generosity, if you knew her, always a friendship
6 thing, generosity.

7 She had this inclusive bone in her body that was
8 amazing because she really wanted us to think outside the box
9 as Christians.

10 She was the one who always wanted to have the Indian
11 people that are Hindu have their birthday parties in our
12 church.

13 She's the person who, a lot of people were mad at me
14 when there was this yoga guy doing his thing here, that was a
15 Terri thing.

16 She thought what the heck, we're a community church,
17 why can't some dude do his yoga in that building. She said
18 it will raise money for the mission here.

19 She saved my backside a lot of times, but she also
20 got me in some hot water with some of the stuff Terri thought
21 of.

22 But that's huge, letting people into the building,
23 even if they aren't Christians.

24 Where do we get those walls?

25 I'm not saying we don't keep some boundaries, but

1 you understand what I'm saying.

2 Here is where I am going with that. I think there
3 are two things in this Elisha story that I really want to
4 zoom in on.

5 That strike the ground, I want to encourage you to
6 go ahead and be angry.

7 Sometimes in the valley we talk to the shepherd,
8 your rod and your staff they comfort me, but it's not
9 comfortable.

10 And sometimes when we talk to the shepherd it's
11 sometimes with raised voices.

12 My dad didn't live long enough to have bad hearing
13 in this life, but, you see, sometimes parents don't always
14 hear the children if they are just knocking lightly.

15 Maybe we need to kind of do a little bit more hard
16 knocking.

17 God, if you are really there, help me with this one.
18 He will.

19 But this reticent little tentative meek will inherit
20 the earth, we are not talking about the earth; we are talking
21 about the kingdom of God.

22 It's war. Pound on the door if you need to. He'll
23 answer. He'll answer.

24 So there is that strike the ground business, and
25 abundance, not scarcity.

1 You might want to do it more than three times, 70
2 times 7 maybe.

3 And here is the verse that just jumps off the page
4 at me, open the window eastward.

5 What is that all about? Here is what I think it's
6 about.

7 I think it's the purpose of your life, is to open
8 the window eastward.

9 What does that mean?

10 Well, it's war. God needs to shoot some arrows.
11 But, you see that is the direction that the son, S-O-N, comes
12 up, the east.

13 We are Easter people, my friends in Christ, so the
14 reason God saved you was to open the window eastward, to
15 shine your light, the light of Christ into somebody else's
16 life.

17 That's why you were created. God did not just save
18 us out of pity.

19 He saved us for holiness. There is a covenant and a
20 kingdom, and it's war, and this meek and mild, turn the other
21 cheek, yes, yes.

22 Bang on the door and open the window of God's grace
23 in your own life and for others.

24 You see, when the windows get opened up it airs the
25 place out. Don't let the air conditioning do it.

1 Open those windows eastward and let the light of
2 Christ in.

3 I love our prayer chapel because in the morning it's
4 just beautiful.

5 You can watch some of the saints on the west side of
6 the room, they're sitting there and the sun is coming through
7 the stained glass windows and you can almost read their
8 minds, this is too bright.

9 This morning I said, "Do you guys realize what a
10 blessing that is when that sun shines through the stained
11 glass windows?" And they looked at me like you have to be
12 joking.

13 That's Jesus. That's Easter. Sometimes it's in our
14 eyes. Hopefully it's in our hearts.

15 It's in us all the time, but sometimes we put up
16 these barriers, you see.

17 So open the windows eastward. Isn't that a great
18 way to look at that?

19 I was running around town yesterday, running into
20 people at Baker's, and they come up to me and say, "Sorry
21 about Terri."

22 "Yes, brutal."

23 "How are you doing?"

24 And I'm saying, "Well, I have had better times in my
25 life, but it's okay."

1 It's war, guys. It's warfare and it isn't fair.
2 The enemy once in a while takes a casualty, but the cool
3 thing is that in life, and even in death, one of those
4 casualties can bring about more life.

5 Wouldn't it be cool if somebody said about you and
6 me, you know, in life, I liked the way they lived life, but,
7 boy, I really liked the way they died death, and then
8 something actually changes in us, that we change the way we
9 live life as a result of that death, or that life.

10 Wouldn't that be cool? That's where I'm at. Wenda,
11 I don't know if you have something else to kind of tweak us
12 with, but strike the ground and open the window eastward are
13 my words.

14 PASTOR WENDA FRY: Thank you, Mark. Yes. I'm
15 struck, no pun intended, by that line because it seems like
16 it would be okay if he just strikes it three times, it would
17 be enough.

18 But I love what Elisha challenges, that we have a
19 God of abundance, not scarcity, so we don't have to ask for
20 the very least.

21 We can ask for everything our heart desires, because
22 that's what the scripture teaches us, that we can keep on
23 asking.

24 There's that story in the gospel about the friend
25 coming at midnight and he opens the door because he keeps on

1 asking.

2 And I think that sometimes we do limit God just by
3 our own finite thinking, because someone else didn't do that
4 to us, or we didn't get enough from that, or that
5 relationship, or that parent, or someone is failing us
6 somewhere in our jobs, or some other part of life, and we
7 transfer that a lot of times I think over to God, like, well,
8 maybe God is like that, but he's not.

9 God is an abundant God, a loving God, he wants to
10 give us the desires of our hearts.

11 So I love that. I had never seen that in there
12 before. Don't limit God, but keep on asking.

13 And I also wanted to say that I knew you were going
14 to speak a little bit about death, and the message that we
15 have in life and in death, like making an impact on people in
16 our lives, and then in our death, like Terri did.

17 In her dying she brought many people to faith.

18 That would be awesome if that could be said of us,
19 wouldn't it?

20 That in our dying, and at the point of death, she
21 brought people to life, like Elisha, that would be really
22 awesome.

23 I left after the wedding last night, and just before
24 I did I opened an Easter card in my e-mail.

25 It said you have an Easter card. I opened it up. I

1 thought this is amazing, an Easter card, it's like Labor Day.

2 I opened up and indeed it was an Easter card. It
3 was yellow and had hallelujah all over it, all those Easter
4 words, He is risen, no one needs to be lost any longer, and
5 all is well because the sting of death is lost and gone
6 forever, a little song with it.

7 It was from one of my sisters in Christ who loves
8 Holy Week and Easter.

9 I'm going to the wedding reception and I get a call
10 from Brenda and she said, "When did you get that Easter
11 card?"

12 I said, "Tonight."

13 She said, "I sent that to you on Easter. You got
14 it, you might not remember it, but you responded to me, you
15 said thanks for the Easter card, happy Easter, He's risen."

16 I said, "Did I? Great. But I just got it again."

17 She said, "Those expire after thirty days."

18 We were silent together on the phone.

19 I said, "The only thing I can think of," because I
20 thought she was sending a new card because Terri wanted
21 everyone to wear Easter clothes at the memorial service, and
22 we all did, it looked like Easter Sunday in here, minus a
23 couple of bonnets, so I thought that's why Brenda was sending
24 me that.

25 I said, "Yes. It was an Easter celebration."

1 The only thing we could work out is that God wanted
2 to send us a message.

3 I guess in cyberspace cards expire after thirty
4 days, but not at the heavenly Hallmark apparently.

5 The message said all who believe in Christ will not
6 die, but they will live.

7 So today I'm thinking as a way of responding to that
8 Easter message, because we are Easter people, even on Labor
9 Day weekend, and there are some candles up here in the front
10 of the pew, and I love that, open the window eastward and let
11 the sun, S-U-N, and Son, S-O-N, come in.

12 And maybe you want to light a candle, come up here,
13 and bring it in honor of someone who has died and that you're
14 thinking of them and you want to thank God for that person.

15 Maybe some of you will do that in honor of Terri.
16 Maybe you're thinking of someone else who died a while ago.

17 And I invite you to take a candle and light it from
18 one of the three candles here and we'll open the windows
19 eastward and ask for that light of Christ to shine into our
20 dark lives.

21 So I ask you, if you want to, light a candle and
22 we'll lift the light upward, heavenward, and offer a prayer
23 of Thanksgiving that we are Easter people.

24

25