

Keeping an Eye on the Horizon
Pastor Jason Bryan-Wegner

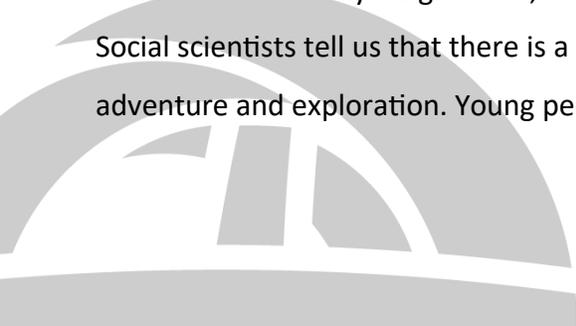
2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14

Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ²Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel.

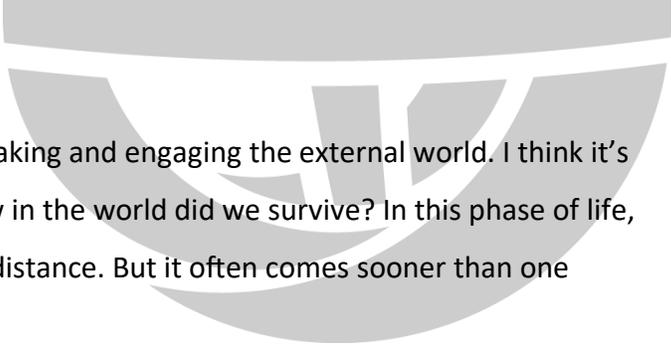
⁶Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.” But he said, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them went on. ⁷Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. ⁸Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

⁹When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.” Elisha said, “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.” ¹⁰He responded, “You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not.” ¹¹As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. ¹²Elisha kept watching and crying out, “Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

¹³He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. ¹⁴He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, saying, “Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?” When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.



Whether we’re always aware of them or we always appreciate them, transitions happen all the time. Some of them seem relatively insignificant, while a few of them have the power to shape whole segments of our lives. Social scientists tell us that there is a three-stage arc in most people’s lives. Our first 25-30 years are filled with adventure and exploration. Young people live in the question, “what is this world all about and how can I

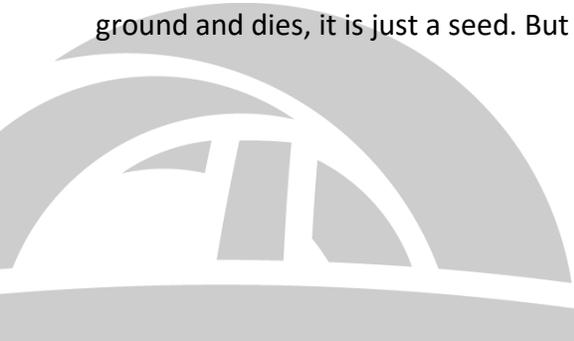


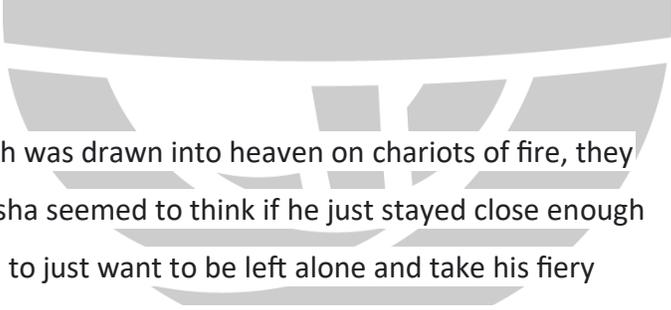
experience as much of it as possible". It's a season of risk taking and engaging the external world. I think it's normal to look back at our younger years and wonder, how in the world did we survive? In this phase of life, all things point to the future. The horizon is way off in the distance. But it often comes sooner than one expects.

As we come into the second third of life somewhere around our 30s, we start to build and protect things like careers and family. Many seek to collect things like titles, status, and wealth. This transition leads to the horizon drawing a lot closer, as life turns inward and we seek to manage the life that we are seeking to build. Middle aged people live in the question, who am I and what difference am I making in this vast world? In the third stage the horizon broadens again. People approaching their 60s may revisit and reshape deferred dreams. There's more time and energy to dedicate to reflecting on what has been as external responsibilities play less a role in daily life. People transitioning into this stage of life often seek to integrate all their past life experiences. Questions might shift to "what do I have to give from what I have acquired?" And eventually, "what kind of legacy will I leave behind for others after I am gone?"

Now, we can certainly be asking some of the questions and focusing on some of these things in any stage of life. Just look at the business model of Harley Davidson. Plenty of 50- and 60-year-olds might take some of what they acquired along the way and live a little like they did when they were in their teens and 20s. Let's just hope they aren't also trying the headstands while riding anymore. In any phase of life, we're best served when the horizons we look to reflect both past and future, like paying attention to both sunrises that point to the coming day, and sunsets that help us reflect on the day that we have experienced. We're also served well by having people in all three stages in our lives to help guide us and remind us to look to the horizons of past and future as they come. The journey is less linear and more cyclical in nature.

The same can be said for our life of faith. We place our hope and trust in a God who embraces the rhythm of past and future, while holding the present. This God-shaped rhythm is best described as a rhythm of life, death, and resurrection. Each call for a transition, and each leads to a different way of experiencing God's presence through the journey of life. Jesus said in the gospel of John, "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it is just a seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit."





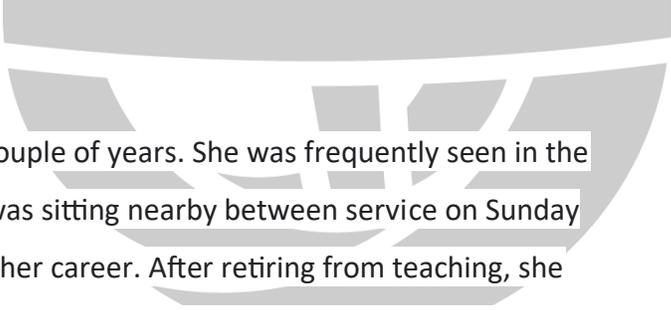
When Elijah and Elisha crossed over the Jordan before Elijah was drawn into heaven on chariots of fire, they were embracing transition, whether they liked it or not. Elisha seemed to think if he just stayed close enough to his teacher, God wouldn't take Elijah. And Elijah seemed to just want to be left alone and take his fiery chariot ride to heaven alone. And yet, they couldn't really embrace the fullness of this moment without the other. Elijah struck the Jordan with his cloak, and the waters parted. Something holy was about to happen. And when they crossed over to the other side, Elijah, the wise elder prophet – the one who had defeated the prophets of Baal, and spoke truth to corrupt power again and again in Israel, asked his younger protégé a question. “What do you want me to do for you, Elisha?” Elisha responded with a request for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. It was his way of saying he was claiming his place as prophetic heir. In response, Elijah tells him to look to the horizon. If he sees Elijah ascend, his request will be granted.

As Elijah ascended, Elisha set his eyes on the horizon and witnessed the whole thing. There was grief over the loss of his mentor, and gratitude for who Elijah was, and what he meant. And when he looked to the ground, he noticed Elijah had left his cloak behind. The cloak was a symbol of prophetic power, and a sign of God's call in Elisha's life going forward. And when Elisha crossed back over alone, he was met by a community who would help him carry what was left to him forward.

We need signs and symbols and community in our lives to help us see the horizons in our own lives. God knows how challenging it can be sometimes to look up from everything coming at us.

When we come into this sanctuary together, it's a crossing over of sorts. We are met by a company of prophets – each of you – who help to give voice to the promise and the call of God in our lives. We enter this holy room and are met by the font – the water that gives forgiveness and marks us with new life in Christ. We follow the river of life, with all its bends and turns reminding us that there is nowhere that we can go where God will not go to find us. We cast our eyes high and see the cross of thorns and are met with the reality of suffering that Jesus took on for us and for our salvation, and we are lead to the light and color of the empty cross – a sign of Christ's victory over every grave, a promise of the life to come. This community of people, and the signs and symbols in this space give us confidence to remember the saints with gratitude and give thanks to God for their witness.





Nancy Olson was one of the saints of Zumbro who died a couple of years. She was frequently seen in the Lounge having a cup of coffee and chatting with whoever was sitting nearby between service on Sunday mornings. Nancy had been a kindergarten teacher most of her career. After retiring from teaching, she described herself as a professional volunteer and loved nature. She put her love for teaching to work in other areas and she passed on knowledge and love to younger generations. What none of us realized, even when talking to her on Sunday mornings was how deeply she was shaped by the signs and symbols, and community of faith. When she died in 2019, she left behind a legacy of gratitude and generosity. She, like many in Rochester, donated her body to Mayo Clinic so that the next generations of medical professionals could continue the advancement of medical knowledge. And though she had only been a member of Zumbro for a few years, she left in her estate a gift of more than \$200,000. This gift came just as we were launching the Our Church, Our Future capital campaign. As the leadership of the congregation became aware of this gift, we realized that our church, and our future extends beyond ourselves, and even beyond death. We are part of Christ's Church, and God's Future. As a congregation, we're called to steward gifts like these, all our gifts, our talents, our passions, our questions and ultimately our entire faith journey. Together as God's people, whether we are always aware of it or not, we're helping each other better understand the world, our place and purpose in it, and what we have to give so that God's world may flourish.

There is something transformative about moments when we set time apart to cross over to the other side, like Elijah and Elisha did. These times give us a chance to set one's eyes on the horizon, and to see more clearly God's place in our lives. All Saints is a time of crossing over – a time, particularly for those who have lost loved ones – set apart to look to the horizon of the past with gratitude and love; and to look to what those loved ones have left behind for us to pick up and see what new ways they help us live going forward. Amen.

