

Communion

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[0 : 00] I'd like you to turn back to the first of the two passages from 2nd Kings that we read earlier. 2nd Kings chapter 2, which is found on page 369 of the Bible.

And reading at verse 9, And when they had crossed, that is, crossed the river Jordan, Elijah said to Elisha, Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?

Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit. Elisha replied, You've asked a difficult thing, Elijah said. Yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours.

Otherwise, not. I would like to begin this morning by telling you about one of the leaders of the church in what we used to call Eastern Europe.

In the days when the countries in Eastern Europe were satellites of the former Soviet Union. The name of this person is Pavel Ohorskay.

[1 : 10] He's a Slovak. And he began his ministry in the Lutheran Church in Slovakia, which is the largest Protestant denomination in that country.

Just at the time, or just shortly after, the communist takeover of the country in 1948. He wasn't very long in the ministry before he was accused of being anti-Marxist.

And he was accused of this. And he was committed to prison. After two years in prison, he was released and had to spend several years in hard labor, working in the forests of that country.

And after, I think, about three years of that, he was set free, but on the condition that he would never preach again.

He was forbidden to preach. He was free to go to church, which he did regularly. And on occasion, he told me he played the organ. But for the next 40 years, he was forbidden to preach.

[2 : 22] But during these years, he formed an underground theological society. And he told me how they would meet in different parts of the country.

They would usually meet when they had another occasion for a meeting, such as a birthday of one of the members, so that if they were asked why they were gathered in a particular house, they would have a reason which the authorities would accept.

The last time I saw him a couple of years ago, it was in his own family home, to which he is now retired, in a village in the north of Slovakia.

And he said that in this very room, he said, very often we met here. And he said we did this in order that we would be ready for the day when communism would fail.

And so for 40 years, these people gathered together as they could with this vision of a future which hardly anyone else in the country shared with them.

[3 : 36] And quite remarkably, by the time communism fell and imploded, Pavel Horskay had retired from the job in the factory which he had lived, he had worked at for most of his working life.

And he was called out of retirement to become the bishop of the church, the general bishop which is like an archbishop in, say, the churches of the West.

The previous bishop had become so compromised by cooperating with the communist government that he had to demit office and a new election was held.

And this man who had retired and was 70 years of age became the general bishop of the church. And people were amazed that he was able to exercise his duties as a bishop with such expertise and such aplomb.

And his appointment or his ordination as a bishop was televised. Many people were amazed that a man who hadn't preached for 40 years could preach so eloquently and so powerfully.

[4 : 58] One person asked him, she said, and this is the lady herself who told me the story, she said, Bishop, she said, how is it that you're able to preach so well having not preached for 40 years?

And his reply was, yes, I haven't preached for 40 years. But during these 40 years, every week, I prepared a new sermon so that I would be ready when the time came.

Now there was a man who had a vision. He saw him who is invisible. He was able to see what the communist government could not see.

He was able to see what many of his own compatriots could not see. He believed that God was at work behind what we see, what we can touch, and what we can feel.

And that is the challenge that is presented to us each time we come to the Lord's table. Because the symbols of bread and wine are symbols of a reality, a spiritual reality that we cannot see, a spiritual reality that we cannot touch physically.

[6 : 21] But a reality nevertheless. And when we come to celebrate the Lord's Supper, we are reminded that we are living not only in a universe of time and space, but we are living in a spiritual universe.

We are living in a much bigger universe, a much bigger world than geologists and geographers and physicists tell us of.

A spiritual world, a spiritual universe. And this story, the story that we, or stories that we have read from the second book of Kings, remind us that there is this other world, this spiritual world that exists behind and beyond the physical world in which we live.

Now when Elisha came to Elijah and said, please let me inherit a double portion of your spirit, he was not asking that he would be twice as powerful as Elijah was.

He was simply asking that he might become the spiritual successor of Elijah, that he might receive Elijah's ministry as an inheritance which he could continue to fulfil.

[7 : 58] Under the inheritance law of the Old Testament, a double portion of the father's possession was inherited by the eldest son. And that's the significance of the phrase the double portion.

He was asking to become the heir, the spiritual heir of Elijah. Elijah promises Elisha that he will indeed receive this gift if he sees Elijah's departure.

Elijah says it won't be easy but it can happen but it can happen only if you see me as I am being taken away.

In other words, he is saying to Elisha if you are able to see what really to other people will be invisible then you can receive the spiritual inheritance.

And Elisha of course does witness Elijah's ascension to heaven of which we read in verses 11 and 12. As the two prophets walked and talked together suddenly there appeared before them chariots of fire and horses of fire.

[9 : 16] A strong wind carried Elijah up to heaven and we read that Elisha saw this and shouted about Israel's chariots and cavalry that had taken his master away and that he tore his clothes in sorrow.

But the crucial point of the narrative is that Elisha had seen the miraculous rapture of Elijah an event which presumably was not visible to any ordinary bystander.

The moment of succession was also a moment of revelation and it was this extraordinary spiritual discernment which Elijah had said would be a sign of spiritual power.

It can happen said Elijah if you see me being taken away from you. And so the spiritual power that was granted to Elijah was also granted to Elisha and he was immediately able to repeat Elijah's parting of the waters of the Jordan proving himself to be to Elijah what Joshua had been to Moses.

We read that he took the mantle of the cloak of Elijah and he went and stood in the bank of the Jordan and struck the water saying where is the Lord the God of Elijah?

[10 : 51] And we read that when he had struck the water the water parted to the one side and to the other and Elisha went over. Elijah had warned that it would not be easy for the power that the Lord had conferred in him to be transferred to Elisha.

It was not something that could be done automatically or mechanically. It called for a great faith on Elisha's part. And this dramatic question in verse 14 where is the Lord the God of Elijah was not an expression of doubt but a cry for help from the Lord.

Another example of the spiritual discernment that was given to Elisha is found in the second reading in 2nd Kings chapter 6 where you remember the servant of Elisha when he got up in the morning looked out and saw that the whole city was surrounded by the army of Aram or the army of Syria.

Elisha and yet when Elisha prays that his servant's eyes might be opened the servant sees what Elisha could see that there was a spiritual army there a spiritual army of horses of fire and chariots of fire all around Elisha protecting him.

Without that vision the servant thought that Elisha was at the mercy of the Syrian army but in fact he was in the palm of God's hand.

[12 : 45] Now Elisha's prayer for his servant O Lord open his eyes that he may see is a prayer that we might offer for ourselves and for one another as we come to the Lord's table because as I've already said the symbols of bread and wine are signs signs of a spiritual reality signs of a spiritual universe a spiritual world that exists behind and beyond and through the world the physical world of space and time in which we live.

A reminder that there's much more to the world to the creation of God than what we can see touch and smell. That's we learn this mostly in the book of Revelation in the New Testament and the word Revelation conveys the title of the book conveys this.

The veil is taken away and we see a spiritual reality, a spiritual universe that operates behind and beyond the universe of which we are aware.

the writer to the Hebrews tells us that it is through faith that we are able to see that which is invisible.

Faith, he tells us, is the assurance of things hoped for and the evidence of things or the conviction of things not seen. Faith is the God given capacity to see the world in this new perspective.

[14 : 20] It transforms our view of life and our attitude to problems and to opportunities. And if we have no faith, we are living in this greater universe but as people who are blind.

All of us belong to this greater universe which God has created, the spiritual universe. But unless we have faith, we are blind and we are unaware of it. And we see only what can be literally seen and touched and felt.

But if we have faith, then we can see beyond that and see as the seer and partner saw in the book of Revelation, a new reality, an additional reality, a spiritual reality that transcends time and space.

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. faith. There are three very simple points I would like to make concerning faith.

Faith is crucial as we come to the Lord's table. It is through faith that we receive the Lord Jesus Christ as we come to his table.

[15 : 37] It is through faith that we receive the grace and the gifts that he offers to us as we are met today around God's word and Christ's sacrament.

The first point I want to make is that faith sees beyond the present. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for. Here the writer to the Hebrews when he utters these words in Hebrews chapter 11 verse 1 is adopting this statement spiritual view of spiritual reality.

And this is a reality which is there but has yet to be fulfilled in all its fullness. It is present but it is also future.

It is and it is also not yet. The spiritual world of the Bible is balanced on the doublets of promise and fulfillment of faith and reward.

And so as we read the Old and New Testaments we are encouraged to look forward to look to a future which has yet to be unveiled.

[16 : 57] The writer to the Hebrews brings out Moses as an example of someone who had this faith. In verse 26 of chapter 11 of the letter to the Hebrews he says Moses considered abuse suffered for Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt for he was looking ahead to his reward.

The writer to the Hebrews is here referring to the decision that Moses took to be identified with his own people when he in effect renounced his friendship in the court of Egypt and identified himself with the people of God.

He saw the spiritual reality he saw beyond his people as a group of slaves. He saw beyond the power which seemed to be almost omnipotent the power of Pharaoh.

He saw the spiritual realities beyond both the power of Pharaoh and the servitude of his people. He saw this spiritual world that Elijah and Elisha saw.

He saw the spiritual world that John in the island of Patmos saw. And so he took his decision. It was by faith that he did this.

[18 : 21] And so when we live by faith we live not by the short term. We live by the long term. We live looking to the future.

Believing that God has gone before us into the future. And that the future is in his hands. And the church of Jesus Christ is the community of the future.

So often the church is identified as the community of the past. And we think of the... Some people tend to think that the church is obsolescent. The church is out of date. Far from it. The church is the community of the future.

The church is the community of destiny at the very heart of God's purposes for the world and for the universe. And when we celebrate the Lord's Supper we're reminded of this because the Lord's Supper not only looks back to the death of Jesus.

It also looks forward to the day when he will come again. As often as you do this, said Paul, writing to the Corinthians concerning their celebration of the Lord's Supper.

[19 : 28] And he says, as he said to them, he says to us, As often as you do this, you proclaim the Lord's death till he come. And so there is this forward look.

Faith sees beyond the present. And as we come to the Lord's table, we are invited to look forward to that great day when this spiritual universe which is there and will be fully revealed.

And when in which a new order will be established from which sin and evil and suffering and injustice will be banished. But faith not only sees beyond the present.

Faith also sees behind the scenes. Faith, as the writer to the Hebrews says, is the evidence of what is invisible, of what is not seen.

The writer to the Hebrews speaks, for example, of the Old Testament tabernacle as a symbol or a parable or an illustration or a copy.

[20 : 43] Of the Bible says, of the Old Testament of the Bible. Of the heavenly sanctuary into which Christ entered as our great high priest at his ascension. He speaks of the rituals of the Old Testament tabernacle as sketches or copies of heavenly things.

And so he invites us to see behind the scenes. And again he reminds us of Moses. By faith Moses left Egypt, unafraid of the king's anger.

For he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. And here the writer to the Hebrews is saying that when Moses left Egypt for the desert, he did so because he saw God.

And in fact it was in the desert that he met God in a special way before the bush. And for the Lord revealed himself in a new way to Moses and called Moses to serve him.

And so we are being invited to see this invisible reality.

[21 : 57] Each time we come to the Lord's table, we are reminded of it through the symbols of bread and wine. Which are but symbols. Symbols of this new reality.

So often when we live, we live conscious only of the universe of space and time. We are like the warehouse people that I, the story I shared with the children last Sunday.

People who lived their entire lives in a warehouse which had no doors. Which had windows, but the windows were covered over with dust. And the people lived their life in this village within a warehouse, totally unaware of the world outside.

And yet there was the wonderful world of nature and of sun and of moon and of stars, of birds and of people outside.

Which they were unaware of. And so often we are like that. We live in a warehouse. I mean the Bible prevents us with an expanding universe.

[23 : 02] It presents us with a far greater vision than one receives from any degree of education that we might receive in this world.

Important as our understanding of God's creation as we see it and touch it is. The Bible tells us that God's creation is much greater.

Much more expansive. And we are invited to see it by faith. We very much live in a visual world in which we live by sight.

We are called to live by faith. To see him who is invisible. But then thirdly, faith not only sees beyond the present and sees behind the scenes, it also sees beneath the surface.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that by faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God. And here the writer to the Hebrews is saying that this physical world in which we live and which we enjoy and for which we give God thanks is a world which he created by his word.

[24 : 25] And it is by faith that we receive that because that comes to us by the revelation of his word in Genesis. And so faith enables us to see as we look at the universe and to look at the physical world, to see something that someone who has no faith cannot see.

To see the hand of God in the creation. To see that he is sustaining it. That he is maintaining it. In fact, Paul tells us that the whole creation is cohering and is being held together and is being coordinated by the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the axle, if you like. He is the core of this physical creation in which we live. He is the one who holds it together.

And it is through faith that we understand that. That's not something that science or technology can discern. It is by faith that we discern this.

And again, the writer to the Hebrews quotes Moses as an example of this kind of faith. By faith, he tells us, Moses kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

[25 : 43] Here, the writer is referring to the time when Moses returned to lead his people out. He was called by God to come at precisely the right time. Because God was at work.

God had not abandoned his people. God was working, if you like, incognito. Under ground. God was at work in the world.

And God is still at work in the world. The world is not out of control, although sometimes it may appear to be. God is at work. We often cannot see that.

It is a work of God that at this moment is often incognito. It is something that we cannot discern. It's like in the parable of the seed growing secretly, a seed which is hidden in the ground.

And although it's hidden in the ground, we still believe it will germinate and that it will grow. But we do not yet see the fruit. We do not yet see the sign of that growth, of that germination and of that growth.

[26 : 48] But we believe it. We believe it. And that's the challenge as we live today. To believe that God is at work. He does hold the world in his hands.

Just as he brought Moses to Egypt at the precise time when these plagues came. He brought about that extraordinary coordination of circumstances.

God was at work beneath the surface. And faith not only sees behind the scenes, it not only sees beyond the present, it sees beneath the surface.

When we receive the bread and wine at the Lord's table, we see more than bread and wine. The bread and the wine are both gifts that come to us from nature, from the creation of God.

Bread comes from wheat. Wine comes from the grape. Both are fruits of nature. And they remind us that God is at work in nature.

[28 : 00] God is at work and it is the work of God, God's providence working in nature. There is the regularity of nature. There is the sequence of summer and winter and springtime.

And harvest. Because God is sustaining it. God is at work. We cannot observe him physically, but we believe that he is doing that. He is there beneath the surface, as it were.

He is there sustaining the physical world which has given us bread and wine. And this is a reminder that God's sustaining, coordinating work is much broader than that.

And that it embraces not simply the physical world, but the world of people. It involves the spiritual world. It involves the entire universe as the Bible can seize it.

As the Bible sees it. So when we come to the Lord's table, we are encouraged to have this faith that sees God at work. And believes that God is at work beneath the surface.

[29 : 12] We read of the leaders, the people who led the tribe of Issachar in the Old Testament. That these were men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do. Or as one translation puts it, these leaders knew the right time to do what needed to be done.

And it's so important for us, when we come to the Lord's table, not simply to affirm our faith generally, in this sense that God is at work, but to ask him to give us the grace, so that we might be able to discern where God is at, if you like, in the outworking of his purposes.

That we also, like the leaders of Issachar, might know the time to do what needs to be done today. A.T. Pearson said that facts are the fingers of God.

And although God is working below the surface, yet there are many times when we can trace his working through his providence.

And we need faith to enable us to do that. God is at work in the world. And we need to look carefully for the first signs of new shoots breaking through the surface of the soil.

[30 : 32] God has given us his word, as Calvin said, to be spectacles, to help us to see what otherwise we would not see. As we look out on the world of men and women.

The world of history and the world of geography. And so Elisha was given this gift. He became the spiritual successor to Elijah.

And faith. The faith of Elijah became his faith. And that faith provided him with a new way of looking.

A way of looking that sees beyond the present. That sees behind the scenes. And that sees beneath the surface. God is asking us to ask him to grant us that faith.

And we are being offered the symbols of bread and wine. When we come to the Lord's table. As stimulants. As signs. To help us.

[31 : 38] To exercise that faith. To grow in faith. And to grow in grace. To grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. This faith.

Was the secret of Elisha's power. Elisha is not mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11. Specifically. But he is undoubtedly implied there.

His presence is implied in that long history of faith. It was through faith. That he was able to do. What he did. And it is through faith that God is.

Calling us to live. And to perform good works for him. In the world in which we live. Archimedes. The Greek philosopher.

Became very excited. By the discovery of the fulcrum. Now you know what. I am sure you know what a fulcrum is. It is a point. In which you can get leverage.

[32 : 37] And if you have got a lever. And you have a fulcrum. Then you can lift. A much greater weight. Than you could. By using. Simply your own strength.

The lever gives you leverage. And enables you to. To do far more. Than you could otherwise do. And faith. You know.

God has given us. A fulcrum for our faith. In the death. And resurrection. Of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ. And. That.

That. Is the. The. The. The. The. The power. That God. Has given to us. Archimedes said. If I had a fulcrum. I could move. The world. And he was thinking.

Of having. A fulcrum. You know. Out there in space. Somewhere. That he could. Actually. Move the world. God has given us. A fulcrum. A fulcrum.

[33 : 33] That is beyond the world. Of time and space. But yet in it. Faith. And that is the life. The life. The death. And resurrection. The ascension. Of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And. By. Focusing our faith. On him. Then. God gives us. A fulcrum. That will enable us. To move the world. And that's precisely.

What the New Testament church did. It turned the world. Upside down. It was able to do. Through the power. Of that fulcrum. What it was. Would have been totally.

Unable to do otherwise. And if we're going to see. The situation in this country. Turning around. We're going to see. The situation here in Europe. Turning around. Then we need to rediscover.

That fulcrum. And rediscover that faith. That will enable us. To move the world. God's power is no less today. Than it was in the day of Elijah.

[34 : 30] It is no less today. Than it was in the day of Moses. It is no less today. Than it was in the day. Of Paul. The apostle. And of the writer to the Hebrews. God's power is the same.

The fulcrum is still there. God is inviting us. To rediscover. Refresh. Today. As we come to the Lord's table. The power of that fulcrum. Not simply.

In our own lives. But in the life of the church of God. In the history of the world. Because God has given us a fulcrum.

That will enable us. That will enable us. To move. The world. May God grant. That we may.

Rediscover that power. And that by his grace. We may indeed move. The world. In our generation. God. That's right. Mary Good thing. God. Things that you need. You're alright. I'm out.

[35 : 31] You're late. football. But in the life of it. Yeah. If you come to the temple. You're right. You're right. In our life. Scorpio. Before God. There. Frsee Jahre. North occurs. Are you.