

GOD'S GOT YOU COVERED

Dear Friends in Christ,

Our sermon text this morning is the Old Testament Lesson assigned to this, the Sixth Sunday of Easter. I'm using the additional verses of 2 Kings 6 to give you "the rest of the story." Let me tell you ahead of time, this is one of my favorite accounts in all the Bible. Despite that fact, I have only preached on this text one time before, when it was the Old Testament Lesson assigned to the 15th Sunday After Pentecost, September 16, 2001, the first Sunday following the terrorist attacks of 09/11. The nation was still in the grip of fear, shocked, saddened and angered by the events of September 11. This text gave me the opportunity to encourage my congregation to "Keep Your Spiritual Balance."

Today is Mother's Day, May 15th of 2015. Our nation is not facing such a devastating tragedy, such a national crisis as we did in the days following 09/11. The memories of that horrible day have already begun to fade. There are young people here today who weren't even born back on 09/11. But the words of 2 Kings 6 are still important, still comforting for us today. And these words are crucial, especially if you ever find yourself in a situation, materially, or emotionally or spiritually, where you're overwhelmed, you feel trapped with no way out.

We listen again to verse 16:

"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

Let me give you the setting in which these words were spoken. We are told earlier in 2 Kings 6 that the country of Aram was at war with its neighbor Israel. Every time the King of Aram sent his army into Israel to ambush the Israelites or to make a surprise attack, the prophet Elisha would warn the King of Israel about the ambush or the surprise raid ahead of time and the Aramean plots would be foiled.

¹¹ This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, "Will you not tell me which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?"

Who's leaking this information? How do the Israelites know all our plans? Which one of you is the spy?

¹² "None of us, my lord the king," said one of his officers, "but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom."

So the King of Aram ordered his army to find the prophet Elisha and capture him. When it was discovered that Elisha was staying in the little town of Dothan, the king ordered his entire army, horses, chariots, infantry, to surround the city at night so that by morning's light Elisha would be trapped and they could arrest him. Doesn't that sound like overkill? Was a whole army really necessary to arrest one hapless little prophet? Actually, as we will see, it was the Aramaean army that was undermanned. Their fight, you see, was not with Elisha but with someone much more powerful.

Elisha knew this but his servant did not. And so, in the early morning, when the servant looked out and saw that the entire Aramean army had surrounded the town, when he saw swords and spears and armor and chariots glinting in the early morning sun, he cried to Elisha, *"Oh, my lord, what shall we do?"* This is it! We're surrounded. There's no way out. We're doomed! What in the world can we do? Elisha told him, *"Don't be afraid."* There's nothing to fear. We outnumber them. *"Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."*

The servant was dumbfounded. "You and me, that's two of us, and you're telling me we outnumber all these soldiers? *"Oh, my lord, what shall we do?"* Nothing. There was nothing to be done, not even a call to God for help, since God had already sent help. And so when Elisha prayed he didn't pray for help. He didn't frantically plead for rescue. He prayed for his servant's eyes to be opened to see the help God had already sent. God answered that prayer and allowed Elisha's servant to see *"the hills full of horses and chariots of fire."* The Aramean army that surrounded Dothan was itself surrounded and outnumbered by a vast army of angels that was protecting Elisha and his servant. Hey, Servant of Elisha, God's got you covered.

Talk about overkill. In 2 Kings 19:35 we are told that an angel, one angel, killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in just one night. If one angel is that powerful think of the potential power of the thousands of angels in the angel army that was assembled to protect Elisha. There's the overkill in this story.

And yes, we believe in the existence of angels. No, they're not chubby little babies floating around in the clouds, equipped with bows and arrows. Nor are angels your loved ones who have died and gone to heaven. Angels are powerful spirit beings that God created to serve us.

Hebrews 1:14 (NIV) *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?*

In Scripture angels sometimes appear with wings. At other times they appear as young men dressed in white. They've also appeared as normal travelers like the time a couple of angels visited Abraham. One way they serve God's people is by keeping us from harm as they were doing for Elisha and his servant.

Now, what does this mean for you? What does this mean for your daily life? Well the next time you're in trouble, before you ask, "What should I do?" remember that your strength and resources are limited. If you first ask "what can I do about this problem" it can lead to frustration, a troubled heart, an overwhelmed spirit. Instead pray first, "Lord help me . . . help me believe your promises. Help me see reality as Elisha did!" You see this is the wonderful thing about God. He's not waiting for you to ask for help – like a fire chief waiting for the 911 call. Listen to Psalm 34:7. *"The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them."* Like secret service agents who never leave the side of the President, God's angels shadow your every move. God's got you covered.

But if that's so, why do Christians get into car accidents? Why do they get hurt at work? Why are they assaulted or even murdered? Do angels have occasional security lapses? No. When a believer gets hurt or is diagnosed with a disease or suffers a loss, it isn't because an angel missed a security assignment. Sometimes they are directed by God to allow or permit a believer to suffer hardship or affliction. On such occasions angels are more like the hovering parent of a baby taking his first steps. Such a parent may let his child fall down so that he will learn better how to keep his balance and eventually get the hang of walking because it's far more efficient than crawling.

God also allows us to experience situations, some of them painful, where our faith will be exercised, where our faith will have a chance to grow beyond a faith that crawls to a faith that walks, a faith that runs. Isn't this why God allowed the Aramean army to get as close to Elisha as it did? God could have directed his angels to dispose of the entire Aramean army long before they came within sight of Dothan. The angels could have done away with every last Aramean soldier, every horse and every chariot if God had so ordered. But if that would have happened, Elisha's servant would have missed the opportunity to see that there was an angel army, not just a guardian angel or two, an angel army looking after him. And if that would have happened, the Aramean army would have missed the opportunity to see how the Lord deals with those who oppose him and those who follow him.

Elisha prayed that his servant could see the spiritual forces that were working for him, and that prayer was answered. Those same heavenly hosts that Elisha's servant saw are still in existence. They are still armed and ready. They are still serving the Lord and still serving believers. They haven't retired. They're not sitting on a cloud somewhere drawing a pension. Someday, when you enter heaven, you will be amazed to learn just how many times these very same angels protected you, saved you, turned you away from small unpleasantries up to and including life threatening situations, and you weren't even aware of it. God's got you covered.

But the angel army is not the only spiritual force in our world. There is another army of angels, evil angels. You need to remember and be prepared for the evil spiritual forces which are working against you, against all believers, against God and his Word and his will. The Apostle Paul told us: *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."* (Ephesians 6:12 NIV).

But how often do you even think about the fight that is being waged over your soul? It's a constant battle and most of us aren't even aware of it. Just as angels are real so are demons and their leader, Satan. And just as the angels protect you and serve you so do Satan and his demons work to tempt you into sin and lead you astray. By now they know your weaknesses. They know what tempts you to sin. With strength from God's word, we make every effort to avoid Satan's temptations.

But isn't that a losing battle? Don't Satan and his demons get you to sin every day? Aren't you urged by your own sinful nature to defy God and do what you think is best for you? Isn't the world around you filled with the message that what is wicked, what is ungodly, what is contrary to God's will is really where fun and fulfillment can be found. But God's got you covered. *"While we were still sinners,"* the Apostle Paul wrote, *"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* Just imagine what kind of mentality, what kind of mindset it would take for someone on the battlefield to donate blood in order to save a wounded enemy combatant. Would you stand in line for a couple of hours to give blood so an ISIS killer of Christian children could be given a second chance to live?

Jesus did. Jesus shed his blood for us even though we were his enemies. *Since we have now been justified by his blood,* (The blood of Jesus pays the debt of sin that you owe.) *Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!"* (Romans 5:8, 9 NIV). God has you, the believer in Christ, God has you covered, covered by the blood of Jesus and robed in his sinlessness. You will not suffer eternally because of your sins, but live forever with Christ in peace and joy.

So what happened to Elisha and his servant? Last time we saw them they were surrounded by Arameans who were surrounded by powerful armed angels. Elisha walked out of Dothan and *“the enemy came down toward him.”* So Elisha prayed again. Only this time he asked for the opposite. Unlike the first prayer that his servant be allowed to see, Elisha’s second prayer was that the Lord strike the Arameans with blindness. And the Lord did so. Immediately the whole army was blinded, confused, as to where they were and who Elisha was.

Elisha told them, “You’re on the wrong road. This isn’t the city you’re looking for. *Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for.*” (2 Kings 6:19 NIV). So Elisha led the Aramean army south a few miles right into the city of Samaria, the capital of Israel and the home of the Israeli army. Then the Lord opened their eyes and they could see they were inside the city walls of Samaria, surrounded this time by the army of Israel.

²¹ When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, “Shall I kill them?”

“May I kill them? Can I wipe them out, please?” Talk about shooting fish in a barrel, this would have been an easy slaughter. Elisha said, “No.”

²² Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master.” ²³ So he prepared a great feast for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master.

Oh my, Elisha let the enemy army, the surrounded and defeated enemy army get away! What was the result of this folly? *²³ So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel’s territory.* They brought back to Aram accounts of the amazing God of Israel and his powerful prophet, and they never set foot in Israel again.

When there is someone, some person, making life tough for you, maybe a co-worker, maybe a neighbor, maybe a relative, how often don’t you wish God would send some affliction on that person to teach them a lesson, to put them out of commission and to give you peace? Sometimes God doesn’t want to bring affliction on your enemy, because deep down inside he wants to save that person. Sometimes God doesn’t want to bring affliction on your enemy, because he wants to work through you to save that person. He wants you to witness a Christ-like response and possibly win another soul for himself.

Have you ever felt as if you were all alone battling your enemies in this life? Do you ever find yourself fearful in today’s uncertain world? Remember, God’s got you covered. Elisha’s first words to his servant were *“Don’t be afraid.”* (2 Kings 6:16 NIV). In our Gospel reading we heard Jesus say, *“Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”* (John 14:27 NIV).

Do not be afraid. That little phrase ‘do not be afraid,’ ‘fear not,’ ‘do not fear’ occurs hundreds of times in scripture. Yet we are fearful people. We fear poor health, sickness, accidents and disease. We fear cancer or heart attack or stroke. We fear the loss of a loved one. We fear the threat of crime and violence. We fear another terrorist attack only this time it could be here, where we live. We fear natural disasters like wildfires. We fear a lack of money, an insecure financial future. Sometimes these fears are so great they can make you feel helpless and surrounded with no way out.

Unlike others who say to you, “Do not be afraid,” God can give you a reason not to fear and he can give you the strength to overcome fear. He’s got you covered. God is ultimately in control of all things. And he has promised to work in and through all things, good and bad, to accomplish what is best for you. He’s already shown how much he loves you by sending his Son to die for you. He has shown the strength and the power to protect you with thousands of mighty deeds over thousands of years. And he has sent his angels to personally guard and protect you. *Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*” God’s got you covered. Amen.