

2 Kings 4:18-37. ¹⁸ *The child grew, and one day he went out to his father, who was with the reapers.* ¹⁹ *“My head! My head!” he said to his father. His father told a servant, “Carry him to his mother.”* ²⁰ *After the servant had lifted him up and carried him to his mother, the boy sat on her lap until noon, and then he died.* ²¹ *She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, then shut the door and went out.* ²² *She called her husband and said, “Please send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can go to the man of God quickly and return.”* ²³ *“Why go to him today?” he asked. “It’s not the New Moon or the Sabbath.” “It’s all right,” she said.* ²⁴ *She saddled the donkey and said to her servant, “Lead on; don’t slow down for me unless I tell you.”* ²⁵ *So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel. When he saw her in the distance, the man of God said to his servant Gehazi, “Look! There’s the Shunammite!”* ²⁶ *Run to meet her and ask her, ‘Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is your child all right?’”* *“Everything is all right,” she said.* ²⁷ *When she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but the man of God said, “Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, but the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me why.”* ²⁸ *“Did I ask you for a son, my lord?” she said. “Didn’t I tell you, ‘Don’t raise my hopes?’”* ²⁹ *Elisha said to Gehazi, “Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy’s face.”* ³⁰ *But the child’s mother said, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.”* *So he got up and followed her.* ³¹ *Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the boy’s face, but there was no sound or response. So Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and told him, “The boy has not awakened.”* ³² *When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch.* ³³ *He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the LORD.* ³⁴ *Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy’s body grew warm.* ³⁵ *Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.* ³⁶ *Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, “Call the Shunammite.”* *And he did. When she came, he said, “Take your son.”* ³⁷ *She came in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out.*

The Spirit of God gives us Life.

- 1. Our faith gives us strength and peace for our daily lives.**
- 2. Our faith gives us a hope that does not disappoint.**

Somehow poised and determined, somehow collected and clear in thought; the Shunammite woman was ready to depart and so she gave her husband a determined look. He thought this was all unnecessary. He didn’t quite understand why she needed to leave and go to see the man of God, now. In this time of such life shattering news she was made steady by her faith and so she looked at her husband and spoke but one word. She said to him, “Shalom”. Strengthened by her faith she departed with this single word of comfort and purpose. “Shalom!” This Hebrew word for peace is commonly used as a greeting or a parting salutation; it also carries the sense that “all is well”. In this time of terrible tragedy she had a sense of peace. It would all be okay. Her faith assured her of this fact and her faith in the LORD gave her a clear sense of direction. She knew what she had to do. She knew where to go. Her faith

in God, her trust in God's servant, gave her stability and peace. Even when her life was spinning, and her hopes seemed to be falling down around her, there was her faith in the LORD that stabilized and strengthened her.

Let's back up and wrap our minds around the events that led us to this point. The Bible tells us that this was a well-to-do woman who made time for God's prophet. She was from Shunem. Elisha the prophet of God would often make his way through town on his way to and from Mt Carmel as he went about doing the Lord's work. This woman thought that it was only good and right that they would show God's servant some hospitality. She had the means to do it, so she saw to it that a small room with a bed, a lamp, a table, and a chair, was constructed and added to her home for the very purpose of housing this man of God.

Elisha was grateful and asked if there was anything that he could do for her. She replied only that she was grateful for the home that she had. Elisha's servant Gehazi, however, mentioned to Elisha that this woman had no child and her husband was getting older. It was a matter of great importance to have a child an heir in those days - even more than it is today. So Elisha made a promise to this kind woman that she would have a child by that same time the very next year. The woman was shocked and humbled, and could hardly believe that the prophet could go to God on her behalf and bring about this special gift for her.

As it turned out, she indeed had the child that was promised to her. What a joy this son must have been to her! That dear child grew and no doubt was the apple of his mother's eye. But then one tragic day this seemingly healthy boy suddenly complained that his head hurt. He ran to his father crying, "My head! My head!" His father had his servant rush the boy to his mother and the boy died in her loving arms. Sitting on her lap, she held her pride and joy. She comforted her son in his pain until the child died.

What terrible heartbreak! What a shocking and sudden tragedy! What mind numbing, bone rattling pain! But this sad story is recorded for us in the Holy Scriptures not just so that we shed a few tears, but it is recorded so that we might learn from this woman's faith. These events are recorded for us so that we might learn of the glory of our gracious God who has power over death and life.

Certainly this poor woman was rattled and shaken and yet she did not come unhinged. But rather she was held fast by her faith, and that faith was demonstrated in her remarkable strength and a surprising level of calm action and peaceful restraint. Even in the midst of this terrible loss she herself was not lost; instead she had clear direction. She knew what she had to do. She knew where she had to go. And so she took the child up to that spare room that she had made for the man of God, placed her son on the bed and made preparations to go and get God's prophet and bring him back with her to her home.

Note the deliberate and steady action that she took. Note the spiritual strength afforded to her because of her faith. This is not to say that she was somehow completely devoid of pain and sorrow. A tidal wave of grief had just crashed into her fragile frame, but in this devastating storm of pain and emotion and grief she was not left helpless and without direction. Her faith centered her and guided her. It was her anchor that held her fast.

This woman's faith had given her spiritual life and it was now molding and shaping her physical life. She trusted that God's prophet could help her, and her faith in the Lord strengthened her and guided her every step of the way. She made the proper preparations, she promptly went to the man of God, and came before him knowing that everything would be ok

now that she was in his presence, no matter what happened it would be alright. She had the peace that comes through faith, but she was not without pain and it poured out of her as she reached the man of God. She voiced her frustration and grief as she searched for answers and came to the man of God and fell at his feet. But she came to him because she knew she would find peace only in the living God that they served. The man of God was indeed able to call on the name of the LORD and give her the help that she needed.

In compassion Elisha, this servant of the LORD, addressed her pain. He had his servant run to her home and check on the boy. Elisha himself went with the woman back to Shunem. When they arrived Elisha went up to the room and found the boy lying dead on the bed in that special room that the woman had made for him. After praying to God he was enabled to heal the boy and brought him back to life. The boy's life was restored and he sneezed seven times, a number that reminds us of God's Spirit and his grace.

Oh the power and the mercy of God! What a wondrous miracle from our God who rules over death and life. God allowed his servant Elisha to give this faithful woman and her son a taste of the inheritance that God has given to all of his people, resurrection and life. God's glory was revealed in this miracle. His mercy and power and grace were put on display. This miracle, however, also showcased the *life and strength* that God gives to his believers. The God-given faith of the Shunammite woman and the confidence and peace and stability that came from forth because of her faith - even in the midst of so much tragedy - is an example of faith that God can use to strengthen our faith.

This is a story of a remarkable resurrection from the dead, and yet the focus of the story is not so much on the dead boy who was brought back to life, but rather our lesson for today finds its center and focus on the remarkable spiritual life demonstrated by the Shunammite woman. Paul would write the following words centuries after the Shunammite woman lived, but she certainly displayed the kind of faith that these words describe. ***11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.***

So today we learn from the Shunammite woman that the LORD grants the gift of spiritual life to his believers. This gift of spiritual life demonstrates itself in our mortal bodies. This was certainly true for the Shunammite woman and because of our faith in the LORD we see it in our own lives and the lives of those around us. A Christian woman visits the freshly laid grave of someone near and dear and though she weeps her tears of sorrow, she knows that everything is alright. Her hope is firmly planted in the LORD Jesus who promises us that there will be a glorious resurrection on the last day and there will be a blessed reunion in heaven for all who believe. When many would be at a loss, this Christian woman has peace. It is her faith; it is the Spirit that dwells within her, that gives her life. It is her faith in her LORD that gives her strength and stability and direction. Christian parents sit next to their sick child and they find strength in God. They feel the pain, they feel the sadness, the grief, and the uncertainty rolling over them like a dark thunderstorm, but they know where to go to find shelter, they know that their Lord is there to help them in the difficult days ahead. A Christian man grinds through the days and is worn down by life. He is worn out by co-workers who belittle his faith and challenge his beliefs, but he is given rest and peace through his God who strengthens him through Word and sacrament. Somehow poised and collected in this life of trouble; somehow clear in thought and filled with peace in this restless world, we as Christians live our lives in

productive and fruitful ways as we praise our faithful God. The Spirit gives us life.

When tragedy or trouble strikes, when everyday life tries to wear us down, we have a faith that means everything to our daily lives. The Spirit is in our hearts because God has come to us through word and Sacrament and now we have life. We have stability and security and peace even in this world that is so full of the opposite. In this world of pain and sorrow and trouble and uncertainty and death we have life. And that spiritual life is on display as we live with direction and purpose. We have strength to endure difficulties. We quickly run to the Word in times of trouble and we find life renewing refuge. We are blessed with pastors and fellow Christians who care for us as God's servants and who apply God's Word to our lives. We have stability and security because we trust in the Lord who saves us and that faith will clearly show up in the kind of lives that we live. We have peace and hope in life everlasting that will not disappoint us; and that is our constant joy that pumps in our hearts and courses through our veins, even when there is grief and trouble all around us.

God has given us this wonderful gift of spiritual life that gives joy and purpose to our lives and helps us to deal with the many troubles of this life, however *real trouble* comes when we grow lazy or cold in our spiritual life. When our faith stops being part of our very essence and part of who we are, and instead it becomes something that we simply do, then we are in trouble. Did you notice the cold way that the husband reacted to his wife's desire to leave and go see the prophet? ***"Why go to him (Elisha) today?" he asked. "It's not the New Moon or the Sabbath."*** For the husband it seemed that religion was at the very most a part of the weekly routine. For the wife this was more than part of her monthly regime or weekly routine, her faith was a part of her. It was her source of life and what her life was based on and revolved around.

This should be the same for us. However, many times we find something else to be the center of our lives. Whether it is our work, or a relationship, or thing or an item, or a pastime or a hobby, often these things become our center, these things become our life. When this is the case faith suddenly becomes that thing we do one day a week, or on special festivals and occasions. Dear friends, remember that God has given us spiritual life. He comes to us through his Word, he sends his beloved servants to us and through them God has touched our lives with his Spirit. He has brought us to faith. He has given us spiritual life that we are to tap into and be refreshed by daily. This lesson of the Shunammite woman reminds us that our faith is to be the center of our life. The Spirit strengthens us, he empowers us; he gives us life. He leads us to live fruitful lives of service and kindness, and all the while the Spirit of God works in us and gives us a hope of eternal life that is the entire backdrop for our lives. We have confidence in our Lord to forgive us, sustain us, help and support us, and when our last day does come we know that we will live with our LORD forever. Just as, surely as, this boy was brought from death to life so too we will one day rise from the grave and we will live. But even better than a second chance at this life, we will be given the endless bliss of eternal life.

As we enter into the home stretch toward Easter, the central festival of our church year, we are reminded of the powerful truth that is at the center of our spiritual life. Jesus is our Savior. Jesus is our life; and through faith in him we forgiveness, and life, and salvation. May this be the source of life and the focus our lives not only during a few days out of the year, or one day out of the week, but each and every day of our lives. The Spirit of God gives you *life*. Amen.