

Sixth Sunday of Easter; May 22, 2022

2 Kings 6:8-17

"It's What You Don't See"

Now when the king of Aram was waging war against Israel, he would make plans with his officials, saying, "My camp will be at such and such a place."

But the man of God would send a message to the king of Israel, saying, "Be careful when you pass this place because the Arameans are going down there." So the king of Israel would send scouts to the place that the man of God had pointed out. So the man of God warned him, and he was kept safe – and not just once or twice.

The king of Aram was enraged because of this. He summoned his officials and said to them, "Won't you tell me who of us is for the king of Israel?"

One of his officials said, "No, my lord the king. It is Elisha, the prophet in Israel, who tells the king of Israel the words which you speak in your bedroom."

Then he said, "Go and see where he is. Then I'll send men and capture him."

He was told, "Dothan is where he is."

So he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They came at night and surrounded the city. When the man of God's servant got up early and went out, there were soldiers, horses, and chariots surrounding the city. So his attendant said to Elisha, "Oh no, my lord! What will we do?"

He answered, "Don't be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, open his eyes so that he can see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he saw that the hills were full of horses and chariots of fire, all around Elisha.

The king of Aram is convinced there is a spy in his ranks. There must be a spy, because every time the king of Aram moves camp to attack the king of Israel, the king of Israel is always one step ahead of him. So the king of Aram reaches the logical conclusion: one of his own officials must be tipping off the king of Israel. **The king of Aram was enraged because of this. He summoned his royal officials and said to them, "Won't you tell me who of us is for the king of Israel?"**

But he's not quite right. Yes, the king of Israel is receiving intelligence reports about where the king of Aram's camp will be moving. But the reports aren't coming from one of Aram's men. They're coming from the Lord's man in Israel: the prophet Elisha.

In fact, if there is a spy in play here, he's probably working against the Israelites, for the Aramean side. How else would an Aramean know this: **"No, my lord the king. It is Elisha, the prophet in Israel, who tells the king of Israel the words which you speak in your bedroom."** And the officials already know where Elisha is: **"Dothan is where he is."**

So what do you think would Elisha's capture mean for himself, his servants, and his attendants? They will likely be made examples of, which will not include a quick, clean death. And once they are disposed of, Israel itself will be at Aram's mercy.

In the middle of the night a “strong force” surrounds Dothan, where Elisha and his servants are staying. Elisha’s servant sees this. And he does what men naturally do: he becomes afraid. After all, he is not a soldier. Elisha’s other servants are not soldiers. Elisha is not a soldier. But they are surrounded by **soldiers, horses, and chariots**. This is what they see. And so one attendant exclaims, with panic and distress in every letter: **“Oh no, my lord! What will we do?”**

What about you? What scary things do you see around you? What do you see that threatens you and makes you think “Oh no! What will I do?” For different people it’s different things. Some people are genuinely afraid as they see the prices for food and gasoline spiking. For many families this is a real threat to their well-being, and it fills their minds with, “What will we do?” For others the thought of a hot war with a major military power makes them afraid.

And the list goes on: Illness. Fractured friendships and family relationships. We see it all around us. What will we do? We live in a country where violent crime ascends. Christians around the world are suffering for their faith, forced to worship underground while hostile governments threaten them. What will we do? The soldiers, horses, and chariots have us surrounded! This is what we see.

And when we see what we see, we often react the way Elisha’s attendant did. Fear. Borderline panic. We react as if what we see is all there is. “Oh no! What will we do?”

So [Elisha] answered, “Don’t be afraid; for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” The attendant was not seeing the full reality. He saw only danger; but there was much more, which he could not see. **Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, open his eyes so that he can see.” Then the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he saw that the hills were full of horses and chariots of fire, all around Elisha.** It is worth the effort to close your eyes and visualize this scene. The low hills surrounding the city of Dothan hosted the Lord’s invisible army of angels, seen as horses pulling chariots of fire. When you close your eyes and visualize it, it’s amazing enough. Imagine getting to see it in person! Elisha’s panicky servant got to do just that. At Elisha’s request, the Lord opened the servant’s eyes to see what he could not before: **those who are with us are more than those who are with them.**

We see many enemies and threats that fill our hearts with fear and make us say, “Oh no! What will we do?” But remember: it’s what we don’t see. It’s what we don’t see that really matters: **those who are with us are more than those who are with them.**

Who are the ones who are with us? Who are the ones we don’t see? We can certainly include those same angel hosts who surrounded Elijah. The Lord often refers to himself as the “The Lord of Hosts” or “The Lord of Armies.” God’s angels are an army that he uses to surround his people and protect them. They are with us, and they are more than everything that fights against us.

But we have more than the protection of God’s angels. We have the protection of our Good Shepherd and risen Savior. He is the one who battled and defeated the scariest and most dangerous enemies of all. He crushed the head of our archenemy, Satan. He rose to kill death. He sacrificed himself to save us from sin. And he lives to watch over us every moment of our lives. Because he has conquered our eternal enemies, we fear them no more.

Nor do we fear any threat. We see frightening things all around us that make say, “Oh no!” But it’s what we don’t see: God has us surrounded with his angels and his risen Son.

Elisha's servant did see the horses and chariots of fire after the Lord opened his eyes. Lord, open our eyes to see! We don't see your angels or our Savior with our physical eyes. But open the eyes of our faith! Help us to hear and trust the promises of your Word. Lead us back each day to the saving waters of baptism, where we saw our Savior in faith for the first time. Lord, give us faith that sees: **those who are with us are more than those who are with them.**

Lord, help us realize that the helpers we cannot see are greater than the threats we can. Send your Spirit to open our spiritual eyes to see Jesus, risen and alive to fight for us. Quiet our fear and panic.

And, with the eyes of our faith wide open, give us peace. How would you like to hear the rest of the story of Elisha and the Arameans? It won't take long, and it's sort of a surprise ending. First Elisha prays for the Lord to strike the Aramean forces blind. Then Elisha instructs the Arameans that the man they are looking for is not in the city. "Follow me," he says, "and I'll take you to Elisha."

Instead, he leads them to Samaria and right into the hands of the king of Israel. **When the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, "Shall I strike them down, my father? Shall I strike them down?"** Israel's king seems pretty eager to slaughter the Lord's enemies. And you may guess that's the reason Elisha has led them there. But it's not: **[Elisha] said, "Do not strike them down. Would your strike down a man you captured with your own sword and bow? Set food and water before them so that they can eat and drink and then go back to their master. So he gave a great feast for them. They ate and drank. Then he sent them on their way, and they went to their master. The Aramean raiding parties did not come into the land of Israel anymore.**

This is right way to look at all the scary things that we see all around us in this world. They are no match for the Lord. What we don't see is greater than what we do see. In the end, God will give us peace and rest from all the frightening things we see in this world. And he'll do it in his time, and in his way.

Elisha told the king of Israel not to strike down blind prisoners of war, but instead to treat them well and send them home. The result was peace for God's people. It was a strange way for the Lord to accomplish peace, but he did it. His time. His way.

This is the promise of the one we do not see, except with the eyes of faith: we will have relief and peace from all the things we see that make us say, "Oh no! What will we do!" Sometimes the Lord grants us that rest quickly, and in ways that our brains find satisfying. We're threatened financially, but quickly land a new, enjoyable, high-paying job. Relief; peace. Other times the Lord withholds relief, which may frustrate our minds and leave us struggling. For example, an illness or pain may linger all the way to the gates of heaven. A family conflict may draw out and take years to resolve.

But the risen and living Lord remains greater than all the threats around us. And one way or another, we will have peace. It may not be as fast as we'd like or the way we'd like, but we will have it.

When the Lord does delay that rest from frightening things that surround us, we must repeat the prayer of Elijah for his servant: "Oh Lord, open our eyes so that we can see. Lord, help us remember Easter. Help us see our risen Savior in Word and sacrament. Open the eyes of faith so we know: those who are with us are more.

Your Savior and his holy angels are on your side. For all the scary things in this world surrounding you, Jesus surrounds you too. And he is greater. He is the one who smashed your eternal enemies and rescued

you from them with holy life, death, and resurrection. And so from everything frightening thing, you will have peace and rest at last.

Lord, open our eyes to see. Amen.