

## Sermon followed by Service

September 3, 2023

2 Kings 13:

It's Labor Day weekend. Some time this weekend, someone here is going to grill. How do you like your burgers? Cooked or half-cooked? And for dessert, we'll have brownies and chocolate chip cookies. How do you like your brownies? Full-baked or half-baked? How about your chocolate chip cookies? Full-baked crispy or half-baked chewy? Some things are all right half-baked, half-done, aren't they? How about half-baked chicken or half-baked turkey? Not so good. Today we hear of something else that's not so good half-done - half-hearted appreciation, half-hearted thanksgiving, half-hearted following God, half-hearted living with God.

In our lesson, Elisha is on his death-bed. He's been God's prophet and miracle-worker for the people and kings of Israel for 60 some years. He started off by splitting the Jordan River and walking across. He then turned food for 20 into food for a hundred. He raised the dead to life. He healed Naaman of his leprosy. And he's gotten Israel and Israel's kings out of more trouble than they'll ever know. Or maybe that's part of God's judgment on them, that they see over and over how much Elisha did for them, and how often they refused to listen to him, and now they spend an eternity kicking themselves. After years and years of bringing God's blessing and promise to Israel, Elisha is on his deathbed.

Joash, the king of Israel, comes to Elisha to pay his respects. It almost sounds like the king respected, looked up to Elisha. He cries over Elisha, blurting out: "**My father, my father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!**" Elisha had done so much for Joash and his people, so much for the kings of Israel and the people of Israel before

him, that a part of Joash looked up to Elisha. But we know something else about Joash; Joash “did evil in the eyes of the LORD”; he continued in the God-rejecting sins of the kings before him. For as much as Joash looked up to Elisha, he wouldn’t let Elisha’s words cook all the way through his heart. He couldn’t be bothered to really listen to Elisha and follow the LORD.

The LORD knew that; so did Elisha. But that didn’t stop the LORD or Elisha from reaching out and offering great promise and blessing to Joash. From his deathbed, Elisha tells Joash: “**Get a bow and some arrows.**” Even on his deathbed, Elisha is in charge. He tells the king: “**Take the bow.**” He then puts his hand over the king’s hand holding the bow. He tells the king: “**Open the east window ... now shoot.**” You can imagine the king wondering, “What’s all this about?” Elisha told him: “**The LORD’s arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Aram! You will completely destroy the Arameans at Aphek.**” This wasn’t just a crack-pot telling the future; this wasn’t just a hope, a wish. Elisha was the man of God, the prophet of the LORD, who with the LORD had worked so many miracles for Israel, who had saved the kings and armies of Israel time and again - Elisha with the LORD was promising Joash victory over Syria, and not just a skin of the teeth victory, but “**you will completely destroy the Arameans at Aphek.**”

Put yourself in the room with Elisha and the king. You know what Elisha has done in the past; you know how he keeps his word and promises. And now Elisha - with the shot of an arrow - promises victory over your enemy, the bully who has been kicking you around for years. We want more of that kind of blessing, don’t we? And Elisha and the LORD have more of that for Joash. Elisha tells Joash to take the rest of the arrows and to strike the ground with them. Shooting the first arrow meant the promise of a great victory for

Joash. What else does Elisha and the LORD have in store with the rest of the arrows? We want to know, don't we? So what does Joash do with the rest of the arrows? He strikes the ground 3 times. Elisha is hot: **“Just three times?! You should have struck the ground five or six times. Then you would have completely destroyed Aram. Now you will defeat Aram only 3 times.”**

After the great promise that Elisha had for Joash with the first arrow, why did Joash strike the ground only 3 times with the rest of the arrows? Why such a half-hearted response? Was Joash too proud, too embarrassed, to really get into what Elisha was telling him? Was Joash too wrapped up in his own thinking to think about what promise God had for him? Was Joash too busy, too lazy, too much stuck on self to offer up anything more than a half-hearted response?

Perhaps you're thinking: “How do we know it was a half-hearted response?” Because the LORD judged it to be a half-hearted response.

And so Joash and his people lost out. God was ready to promise them more and bless them more, but Joash with his half-hearted response left God's blessing and promise on the table.

Makes one wonder, doesn't it? In our Gospel lesson, Jesus promises: **“Ask and it will be given you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened unto you.”** Do you notice the increase in intensity? “Ask, seek, knock!” How much blessing do we miss out on because we don't ask? How much blessing do we miss out on when our prayers are half-hearted? Makes one wonder, doesn't it?

How are your finances? Part of me tells me: “You better watch out; things are going bad.” Another part of me tells me: “You better keep up, catch up; they’re having more fun than you.” You know what I mean? With part of me thinking this, and part of me thinking that, what so easily can happen to our giving, our financial partnership with the LORD? So, let me ask: “How are your finances? How is your giving?” Full-hearted generous or half-hearted worried and distracted? **“Whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly; whoever sows generously will reap generously.”** Makes me wonder: How much blessing do we miss out on because of half-hearted giving?

It’s not just about money and stuff. How is your heart? Not, how is your heart pumping? But, how is your heart and mind at peace? Jesus says: **“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.”** Not just for this hour, but during the week, what kind of quality time do you have talking to Jesus, listening to Jesus in his Word? In other words, how is your home devotion life, your home Bible-reading? Full-hearted or half-hearted and hurried? How much peace and rest and blessing do we miss out on because we come to Jesus and listen to Jesus hurried, distracted, half-hearted? Makes one wonder, doesn’t it?

But half-hearted is more dangerous than just missing out on some blessing. In the book of Revelation, what does Jesus say he will do with the luke-warm, the half-hearted? He will spit them out. The danger of a half-hearted life with Jesus isn’t just that we miss out on some blessing; the danger of a half-hearted life with Jesus is that we miss out on Jesus.

It’s amazing, isn’t it? The LORD knew Joash: “He did evil in the eyes of the LORD.” Elisha knew it too. And yet, what? The

LORD with Elisha offers up blessing and promise for Joash. And the LORD is ready to do so much more for Joash. And not just for Joash. The LORD was ready to do so much more for the people of Israel, but they would not listen; they would not follow; they wouldn't give God more than a half a heart. And yet God was patient and kind, caring and compassionate. Why? Not because Israel and her kings deserved patience. Not because God is satisfied with half a heart. No, God was patient and kind because he had made a promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and even if Israel wouldn't hold on to his promise, he would - he would keep his promise.

What about us? Thinking about this sermon this past week was hard. There's a part of me, a part of us, that needs to hear - half-hearted ministry, half-hearted prayer, half-hearted love for God doesn't save us any time, any money, any energy. Half-hearted ministry, half-hearted prayer, half-hearted love for God costs us because a half-hearted life before God leaves God's blessings on the table. I need to hear that; we all need to hear that. At the same time, what do we see in our lesson? A God who wants to bless. A God with great promises. A God who wants to bless you, and work great promises for you.

And so what does God do? He doesn't just say: "Good enough," like half-hearted is good enough. And he doesn't just spit us out like he can't stand us. No, he gives us Jesus; he counts us with Jesus; he covers us with Jesus and his whole-hearted life. Can you think of a time when Jesus ever did anything half-hearted? He loved and lived for God with his whole being. He loved his neighbors, not just as he loved himself, but more than he loved himself. Look at the cross; that's where we see his whole-hearted life, his whole-hearted love, the best. There he worked God's plan to forgive us. There he took your place and my place as someone to be spit out by God. Yes,

Jesus took our place being spit out by God. But instead of turning against God, or quitting on God, or giving up on God, Jesus gave his whole heart and whole life to God. And what did God do? He counted Jesus as right and raised him back to life.

You have that life, Jesus' life, as yours. In your baptisms God covers our half-hearted praying and singing with the voice of Jesus. He covers our half-hearted giving with the giving of Jesus. He covers our half-hearted life with the whole-hearted life of Jesus. He counts the whole-hearted life that Jesus lived - loving God with all his heart, loving and doing good with all his heart - God counts Jesus' whole-hearted life as yours, calling you right for life with him today and right for life with him forever in heaven.

What do we do with that? Sadly, some will coast into half-hearted living and get spit out even after all that Jesus has done for them. But some - I'm talking about you! - we won't settle for a half-hearted life with God, will we? No, this is the life we set our hearts on - Every day with Jesus, we set our hearts, our whole hearts, to live for the glory of God. Every day, we set our hearts, our whole hearts, to live for the good of his people. And what do we find? God has more blessing for us than we could ever imagine. God is so good to us! Amen.

## DIVINE SERVICE I

**IN OUR WORLD TODAY ...** we hear the classic “Good enough for government work,” and more recently of “quiet-quitting.” We even hear “Good enough for church work” and “I don’t need to go to church to be a Christian.” People used to be ashamed (for the most part) of getting by and going through the motions. Now getting by and going through the motions seems to be a more accepted way of life as our world is more and more comfortable with worship of “self.”

**IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ...** we hear Jesus and his prophet expect more in our relationship with God, and when we are self-satisfied with less, we should expect less from God. With what God sees from his world (and sometimes his church), isn’t it amazing how much blessing and promise he puts before us?

### OPENING HYMN

*“All Praise to God Who Reigns Above”*

**Hymn 603**

All praise to God who reigns above, the God of all creation,  
the God of wonders, pow’r, and love, the God of our salvation!  
With healing balm my soul he fills, the God who ev’ry sorrow stills:  
To God all praise and glory!

What God’s almighty pow’r has made, in mercy he is keeping;  
by morning dawn or evening shade his eye is never sleeping.  
Within the kingdom of his might, all things are just and good and right:  
to God all praise and glory!

I cried to him in time of need: Lord God, O hear my calling!  
For death he gave me life indeed and kept my feet from falling.  
For this my thanks shall endless be; O thank him, thank our God with me:  
to God all praise and glory!

The Lord will not forsake his flock, his chosen generation;  
he is their refuge and their rock, their peace and their salvation.  
As with a mother’s tender hand he leads his own, his chosen band:  
to God all praise and glory!

All who confess Christ's holy name, to God give praise and glory!  
Let all who know his pow'r proclaim aloud the wondrous story!  
All idols under foot be trod— The Lord is God! The Lord is God!  
To God all praise and glory!

#### INVOCATION

In the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

#### CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

M: Beloved in the Lord: let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins to God our Father, asking him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness.

C: **Holy and merciful Father, I confess that I am by nature sinful and that I have disobeyed you in my thoughts, words, and actions. I have done what is evil and failed to do what is good. For this I deserve your punishment both now and in eternity. But I am truly sorry for my sins, and trusting in my Savior Jesus Christ, I pray: Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.**

M: God, our heavenly Father, has been merciful to us and has given his only Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Therefore, as a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son (+) and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

#### GLORY TO GOD *Glory in Excelsis (Sung)*

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.  
Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father,  
We worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory!  
Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.  
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God,  
Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; Have mercy on us.  
You are seated at the right hand of the Father;  
receive our prayer, Receive our prayer.  
Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.



For you alone are the Holy one, you alone are the Lord,  
You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,  
With the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father.  
Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.  
Glory to God, glory to God!

#### PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord God, in mercy receive the prayers of your people. Grant them the wisdom to know the things that please you and the grace and power always to accomplish them; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.  
**Amen.**

#### FIRST READING

*2 Kings 13:14–25 (select)*

Now Elisha had been suffering from the illness from which he died. Jehoash king of Israel went down to see him and wept over him. “My father! My father!” he cried. “The chariots and horsemen of Israel!”

Elisha said, “Get a bow and some arrows,” and he did so. “Take the bow in your hands,” he said to the king of Israel. When he had taken it, Elisha put his hands on the king’s hands.

“Open the east window,” he said, and he opened it. “Shoot!” Elisha said, and he shot. “The LORD’s arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Aram!” Elisha declared. “You will completely destroy the Arameans at Aphek.”

Then he said, “Take the arrows,” and the king took them. Elisha told him, “Strike the ground.” He struck it three times and stopped. The man of God was angry with him and said, “You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times.”

Elisha died and was buried...

Hazael king of Aram oppressed Israel throughout the reign of Jehoahaz. But the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion and showed concern for them because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob...

Hazael king of Aram died, and Ben-Hadad his son succeeded him as king. Then Jehoash son of Jehoahaz recaptured from Ben-Hadad son of Hazael the towns he had taken in battle from his father Jehoahaz. Three times Jehoash defeated him, and so he recovered the Israelite towns.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM OF THE DAY

*Psalm 40B sts. 1, 5-6*

1 I wait - ed, wait - ed for the LORD; he turned and  
 5 Your con - stant care, your stead - fast love I ev - er  
 6 May all who seek to take my life be made to  
 heard my plea. And from the pit, the mire, and clay, he  
 will re - veal, and from the great as - sem - bly, LORD, your  
 bear the blame; may all they do fall back on them and  
 fi - n'ly lift - ed me. High on a cliff he  
 truth will not con - ceal. Do not with - hold your  
 cov - er them with shame. Let all who fol - low  
 set my feet, gave me a base to stand, a new song  
 mer - cy, LORD, for I can hard - ly see; so man - y  
 you re - jice and say, "The LORD is great." I am so  
 put up - on my lips to make his prais - es grand.  
 sins op - press my soul— my heart is fail - ing me.  
 poor. I need so much. My help - er, do not wait.

## SECOND READING

*James 5:13–18*

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

*Romans 12:12*

Alleluia. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Alleluia.

## GOSPEL

*Matthew 7:7–11*

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

“Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

## NICENE CREED

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

**HYMN OF THE DAY**

*“Be Still, My Soul, before the Lord”*

**Hymn 724**

Be still, my soul, before the Lord, for God is always near.  
Before your mind is moved to pray, God listens and will hear.

You need not multiply your words nor pray with practiced art.  
Beyond all speech, God understands the hunger of your heart.

Wait, then, in quiet confidence, your anxious thoughts at rest.  
God knows your needs before you ask and works for what is best.

Be still, my soul, before the Lord; on God in patience wait.  
God’s love, unseen, surrounds your life; God’s help will not be late.

**SERMON**

## CREATE IN ME (SUNG)

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.  
Do not cast me away from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and uphold, uphold me with your free Spirit.

## PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Almighty God and Father, we thank you for all your mercies, especially for the gift of your Son, through whom you have revealed your gracious will. We praise you for the Holy Spirit and his working through the means of grace.

**Plant your Word in our hearts, and cause it to produce fruit in our lives.**

Strengthen and defend your Church, that by your Word and sacraments faith may grow and love toward all may increase.

**Support all who spread the light of your truth throughout the world.**

Keep our children in the grace of their baptisms. Enable their parents to train them in lives of faith.

**Raise up Christians to serve you in the ministry of the Word and in all godly walks of life.**

Preserve our nation in justice and honor. Guide and bless all who make, administer, and judge our laws.

**Give them wisdom that they may promote justice and hinder evil.**

Let your blessing rest on planting and harvest, commerce and industry, medicine and science, the arts and culture. Protect all who travel, and care for those whose work is difficult or dangerous.

**Be with all who devote themselves to any useful task.**

Comfort all who are in sorrow or need, sickness or adversity, [especially . . . here name the person and the cause of the petition]. Remember those who suffer persecution for the faith. Have mercy on those for whom death draws near.

**Grant them your love, and take them into your tender care.**

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

*Silent prayer*

We remember with thanksgiving those who have loved and served you, who now rest from their labors, [especially . . . here name the person].

Console those who are mourning or living with sadness.

**Keep us in the true faith, and bring us at last to the joys of heaven.**

Grant us these things, Father, for the sake of Jesus, who died and rose again.

**Amen.**

#### LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

#### THE SACRAMENT

(Guests, please see our communion practice on page 2.)

(Gluten-free wafers are available; ask Pastor.)

M: The Lord be with you.

C: **And also with you.**

M: Lift up your hearts.

C: **We lift them up to the Lord.**

M: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

C: **It is good and right so to do.**

M: It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who promised that wherever two or three come together in his name, there he is with them to shepherd his flock till he comes again in glory. Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:

### **HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (SUNG)**

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power, God of might:  
heav'n and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna in the highest.

### **WORDS OF INSTITUTION**

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my (+) body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my (+) blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The peace of the Lord be with you always. **Amen.**

### **O CHRIST, LAMB OF GOD (SUNG)**

O Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world;  
have mercy on us.

O Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world;  
Have mercy on us.

O Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world;  
Grant us your peace. Amen. Amen.

DISTRIBUTION HYMN

*“When in the Hour of Utmost Need”*

Hymn 723

When in the hour of utmost need we know not where to look for aid,  
when days and nights of anxious thought  
no help or counsel yet have brought,

Then is our comfort this alone that we may meet before your throne;  
to you, O faithful God, we cry for rescue in our misery.

For you have promised, Lord, to heed your children’s cries in time of need  
through him whose name alone is great, our Savior and our advocate.

And so we come, O God, today and all our woes before you lay;  
be with us in our anguish still, free us at last from ev’ry ill,

So that with all our hearts we may to you our glad thanksgiving pay,  
then walk obedient to your Word and now and ever praise you, Lord.

CLOSING PRAYER

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.  
**and his mercy endures forever.**

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup,  
**we proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.**

We give thanks, almighty God, that you have refreshed us with this Holy  
Supper.

We pray that through it you will strengthen our faith in you and increase  
our love for one another. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and  
forever. **Amen.**

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**



## CLOSING HYMN

## *“What a Friend We Have in Jesus”*

Hymn 721

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry ev’rything to God in prayer!  
Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh, what needless pain we bear,  
all because we do not carry ev’rything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged— take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our ev’ry weakness— take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Savior, still our refuge— take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Do your friends despise, forsake you? Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
In his arms he’ll take and shield you; you will find a solace there.

## OFFERING

*If you prefer online giving, you may scan this code  
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Join us **Saturday, September 9**, for our annual Church-School Picnic!

**We worship at 4 p.m.** with our school children singing. Feel free to wear your St. John t-shirt to worship and the picnic!

**We picnic at 5ish.**

Wondering how you can help?

- Set-up at 10 am on Saturday, September 9
- Bring side dishes and desserts
  - families with the last name A-L bring Side Dishes
  - families with the last name M-Z bring Desserts
- Set up food
- Take down/clean up

We hope to see you there!

Please reach out to Sheryl Linnemann with any questions,  
[sheryl359@gmail.com](mailto:sheryl359@gmail.com).