

Sermon on Sunday 6 July 2025

by Rev. Bill Church

Third Sunday after Trinity

Readings: 2 Kings 5. 1-14 & Luke 10. 1-12

Let's look at the reading from 2 Kings.

Clearly the star of the show is Elisha.

He was the successor to Elijah and both were active after the glory days of the kingdom of David and Solomon, after it had split into two rival kingdoms – Judah in the south based on Jerusalem, and in the north based on Samaria, the kingdom called Israel (confusingly, because that name has also been used for all the descendants of Jacob).

Elijah and Elisha prophesied in the kingdom of Israel. Some of Elisha's works look suspiciously like repetitions of what Elijah had done, but this one is exclusively Elisha's.

Naaman was commander-in-chief of the army of the neighbouring, and hostile, state based on Damascus (not much has changed over the millennia!).

But he had leprosy.

Whatever it really was medically, this was a disease that led to you being treated as unclean.

One king of Israel had leprosy. He was allowed to remain king, but he was not allowed to appear in public. So being inflicted with leprosy, or cured of it, was a really big deal.

Naaman is not easy to like and we get a picture of a man with a real sense of his own importance – he gets a king-to-king introduction (leading to the almost comic panic by the King of Israel that it is all a ruse to pick a quarrel); he comes with a military escort of horses and chariots (which will not have reassured the King of Israel) and with a fabulously valuable gift (which Elisha later refuses to take); he expects personal and deferential attendance by the prophet and some elaborate ritual.

What he gets is a message suggesting he washes in the Jordan, which he spurns.

Like too many people since, he assumed that his exalted status meant that anything to do with him must be expensive and complicated, and so rejecting a cheap and simple solution.

There are two subsidiary heroes in this story – first, the little slave girl in Damascus.

She had a heart kind enough to want to help the man who had kidnapped and enslaved her, and a bold enough spirit to speak up, pointing Naaman to a hope of a cure.

And second, Naaman's servant who was brave enough to criticise his angry master and put forward the argument that led him to achieving a cure.

Too many attendants upon powerful figures just curry favour by always agreeing with them and telling them what they want to hear. And so Naaman went and dipped in the Jordan and was cured.

That is the end of the story in the Lectionary reading, but it is not the end of the story.

Naaman returned to Elisha and acknowledged the power of the true God and vowed to worship him.

In other words, he had come to faith through the blessing of healing.

And that is the link to the Gospel, where Jesus sends out disciples to travel to where people are and proactively to heal the sick.

Their ministry, too, was fruitful – they returned with joy to tell Jesus how they had overcome evil spirits in his name.

They, who had gone out, were effective channels of evangelism, just as Elisha and the slave girl who had spoken the right words without moving from where they were.

God moves in different and mysterious ways as need and opportunity arise.

God invites us to be bearers of the good news when, where and how need and opportunity arise.