Sermon on Remembrance Sunday, 8 November 2026 at St Andrew's
by Geoff Oates, Lay Reader

Readings: 2 Kings 5. 1-10, 14-15a & Matthew 25. 1-13

The story of Elisha and Lamaan the Leper from II Kings, is not, perhaps, the readings you might expect on Remembrance Sunday, but in this time of continuing bitter conflict in Palestine and Ukraine and the Arabian Gulf, it is very relevant again as we remember all those who have fought and suffered in war.

Imagine, back in 1941, in the middle of the Blitz, Winston Churchill visits the smouldering ruins around Ludgate Hill after a heavy night's bombing. An orderly arrives and delivers a diplomatic despatch to him. It's a letter from Adolf Hitler:

Dear Mr Churchill,

I hear from one of the Prisoners of War we're holding that there's an excellent dermatology department at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London.

My good friend Air Marshall Goering is suffering terribly from eczema. Please be so kind as to arrange an appointment for him. I enclose a generous donation to the hospital roof restoration fund.

Yours,
Adolf

I hope you do not find the humour inappropriate. That didn't actually happen, I made it up. But that is exactly what did happen to King Joram of Israel in the time of

Prophet Elisha, maybe 850 years before the birth of Christ. The King of Syria, his warlike neighbour, who is constantly raiding and pillaging his northern provinces, sends his greatest general to him with a letter saying, 'Please heal him of his skin disease.'

There's some rich irony in this story. General Namaan only knows about the healing power of the prophet Elisha through a slave girl that he's kidnapped from Israel on one of his military campaigns. It's amazing how the seeds of God's grace find space to grow in the most unpromising of soil. But General Namaan can't just head off to look for Elisha. His is the world of politics and diplomacy, things have to be done through the proper channels. Namaan has to ask his boss, King Benhadad, and King Benhadad has to send a letter of introduction to King Joram. He may well be invading his Kingdom again in a few weeks, but for now, there are procedures to follow….

Of course, King Joram can make no sense of this. Is that nasty bully Benhadad taking the mickey, is he trying to pick a fight? But Elisha the prophet can see clearly. His head isn't befuddled and corrupted by power politics and international diplomacy. He sees the hand of God at work, and urges King Joram to grant Namaan's request.

For Elisha, this is not a sign of weakness or fear. It is not an act of Appeasement. It is not even an act of reconciliation. It is an opportunity to show God in action. How shall we show to the Syrians the great power of the God of Israel? By the strength of our armies? No. By the splendour of our fortified cities? No

– let us show the power of our God by healing our enemy of his sickness.

That is a lesson we have to relearn time after time. How often through history has the Gospel of Peace spread out across the world behind an array of shields and chainmail, of muskets and gunboats. In Gaza, just a little way south east of the River Jordan where Namaan was healed, the lesson is crying out to be learned again.

Praise God for all those who, like Elisha, have the faith to reach out across frontiers, to carry the white flag across no-man's-land, and offer healing to their enemies. Not because they think their own cause is wrong, or their enemies right, but because they know that God's will for all His creation is Peace, and His healing power alone can deliver it.

And remember where that healing began. Not in the corridors of wealth and authority, but with a slave girl taken hostage in some ancient terror raid nearly three millennia ago, whose faith and compassion looked beyond the injustices that she had suffered, and wished for healing for her tormentor. In the scheme of God's grace, the gift of healing may often be in the hands of the victim.

Let us show the power of our God by healing our enemies.

As I watched the Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance last night, as the myriad poppy leaves

fell through the air, my mind turned to the words of the Book of Revelations.

The weird, wonderful and sometimes very warlike vision that is the Book of Revelation brings us back, at the very end of our Holy Scriptures, to that same truth.

The story that began with a tree and a river in a garden of primaeval innocence, ends with a tree and a river in the City of God. 'And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the Nations'. For all our world's long history of conflict, pride, greed and injustice, God holds out the promise of healing when we finally acknowledge his Kingdom.

Remembrance, and gratitude for the servicemen and women of our own nation and commonwealth, is a fleeting shadow unless it is built upon the honest desire to find healing, healing for all the wounds and traumas that history has inflicted on the peoples of our world. Healing that transcends triumphalism, condemnation, guilt and vengeance.

'And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the Nations.'

And how shall we show the power of our God? By healing our enemies.

Amen