

Welcome to our All Age Worship Service - 24th May

Prepared by Mervyn Bedford

Being a church family is one of our highest values. There are people in our church family who some of us haven't seen now for many weeks. Look out for some familiar faces in today's service!

Many of us are starting to feel weary of this season and particularly as we face easing out of lock-down into a different financial and social climate and way of life.

We want to encourage you to be strong in faith that God is at work shaping us as individuals and a church for his purposes. As a church we have an opportunity to minister into community that is ripe for harvest. People are no longer consumed by material things or personal advancement and basic physical, emotional and spiritual needs are at the forefront of people's lives. As a church we have the great honour of sharing and demonstrating the love of God and by so doing introducing our community to Jesus who is the answer to every need.

Please do continue to engage with the weekly services and to pray so that as a church we remain together, strong in faith, hope and love and full of gratitude for all that we are and all that we have in Jesus.



Prayer

Dear God

Thank you for the treasures to be discovered in your word, The Bible. Help us to engage deeply with the story we are looking at today and see ourselves afresh in the light of your love and plan.

Thank you that you are at work reconciling the world to yourself, help us to find our place in that work and be refreshed and inspired to play our part.

In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

This week we are going to focus on an incredible little story with so many things to teach us. So many levels and different perspectives to explore with many connections to the struggles of everyday life. So, my disclaimer is that I'm not going to do it justice in a short talk! As you read it, try to imagine how the different characters may have felt.

Themes that connect with life in 2020

- Injustice and exploitation of the vulnerable
- Enforced separation from family and friends (Lock-down)
- Grappling with sickness, its repercussions and restrictions (Another kind of lock-down)
- Choosing a good attitude when there are many valid reasons to have a bad one!
- Juggling our egos - Pride verses humility
- Handling spiritual tensions

2 Kings Ch 5 v 1-19 Naaman and the Servant Girl

Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy. ^[a]



² Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. ³ She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."



⁴ Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. ⁵ "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents^[b] of silver, six thousand shekels^[c] of gold and ten sets of clothing. ⁶ The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy."



⁷ As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!"



⁸ When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel." ⁹ So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. ¹⁰ Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."



¹¹ But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. ¹² Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.



¹³ Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'!" ¹⁴ So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.



¹⁵ Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant."



¹⁶ The prophet answered, "As surely as the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing." And even though Naaman urged him, he refused.



¹⁷ "If you will not," said Naaman, "please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the LORD. ¹⁸ But may the LORD forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I have to bow there also—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant for this."



¹⁹ "Go in peace," Elisha said.



I want to unpack the story a little through the prism of Faith, Hope and Love

Faith

The opposite of faith is doubt and fear; there were several places where doubt and fear could have built a stronghold in this story, but we see that one tiny seed of faith planted by the young girl changes the whole situation.

Without healing for his Leprosy Naaman would have been forced to live in isolation with the bleak outlook of slowly dying of the disease, but he chose to listen to the little voice of faith that had come into his situation. He stepped out onto a faith journey and was heading in the right direction but pride nearly stopped him receiving his healing. What a lovely caring attitude his servants display at this point in the story. They listen to his hissy fit and then gently steer him towards making the right, humble decision. Am I that kind of friend?

So, Naaman gets into the Jordan river. The River Jordan is significant throughout the Bible; in Hebrew the name Jordan means, “the descender” or “the one who descends” Interestingly, the River Jordan starts from the highest place visible in Israel, it then descends deeper than any other river in the world as it finishes in the Dead Sea, 400 metres below sea level. Here the river reminds us of Jesus the one who descended from the highest place down into the deepest depths of our sin and death. (Thanks to Pete Williamson for his knowledge of the Hebrew here!)



As Naaman engages with the River Jordan by dipping seven times it is symbolic of him being in a relationship with Jesus; the other two rivers he mentions don't share that wonderful symbolism. What a beautiful picture of our relationship with Jesus; engaging - through obedience - with the living water and being restored to life and wholeness!

The enemy is at work trying to build strongholds of doubt and fear in our lives.

- **Are there areas in your life that feel held back by doubt and fear?**
- **Is there a small voice speaking faith into your situation?**
- **Do you need to respond in anyway to that small voice?**

Hope

The opposite of hope is despair.

Suddenly snatched from her family and friends with no idea if she would ever see them again, this little girl is placed into a different culture with unknown customs, and with no choices about her future. The trauma of this event in her young life must have been awful - lock-down on a very different level!

This story inspires me! A young girl with so many reasons to feel full of despair and wallow in self pity chooses to offer hope to others, and not just anyone, but to her captors!

We don't know how old the girl in the story was or how long she'd been with the family; she would probably have had to work through a whole spectrum of feelings and emotions. However, at some point she realises that she has some information that could change the whole situation and she chooses to share the good news.

I wonder if her situation improved when Naaman returned healed and restored? We don't know, but I'm sure she would have found extra favour within the family



When we give hope it produces hope! If nothing else, she would have the joy of knowing she had played a part in trying to make someone else's life better. That in itself is a wonderful candle of hope to have burning in your life.

In life at times our freedoms and choices may be restricted, but nobody can take away our freedom to choose our attitude. The attitude we choose plays a huge part in how we feel; just taking 5 minutes during the week to do the A-Z praise game brought joy into my day. If you didn't see it on the update last week, we set everyone a little challenge to go through the alphabet and praise God for something beginning with each letter!

A B C ...

You may be in a situation where you don't see any immediate hope for yourself,
but can you see a way of offering hope to someone else?
Remember, giving hope produces hope!

Love

The opposite of love is hate!

Jesus held up children as role models for adults and kingdom living. Here we see this little girl modelling some of his key teachings – Love you enemies!

Our natural response is to hate and resent our enemies and these feelings need time to be processed, but Jesus calls us to a better way of living and to bless those who persecute us. Even while he was enduring excruciating pain and injustice being nailed to the cross, Jesus prays “Father forgive them”.

We see God’s love in action on different levels in this story. The Bible says several times that the Lord disciplines those he loves. There is no doubt that God loves his people Israel; many times throughout the Old Testament we see God allowing Israel’s enemies to temporarily overcome them - a discipline to bring them back to him! This story is set in such a context.

We see God’s love for the little girl by providing a family to meet her physical needs, giving her the gift of faith and setting her in a context where she can use it and make a difference.

We also see God’s love overflowing through Israel to a neighbouring nation as he lovingly heals Naaman. This is God’s intention to reach out to the whole world with his love through his people.

Jesus mentions this story of Naaman in Luke 4:27 to underline that God’s love and reconciliation is an international project!

A final thought... I love the way that Elisha responds to Naaman at the end of our reading. Naaman has clearly become a believer and follower of the one true God and is setting off with two donkey loads of Israeli soil to create a mini Israel to help him worship God at home. However, he is troubled by the fact that at times he will have to support his king in his worship of Rimmon. Elisha simply responds “Go in peace”. This gentle answer is so life giving and gives Naaman the space and time to grow in his new faith. I feel that if Elisha had given a legalistic “absolutely not,” Naaman’s new faith could very likely have been crushed.

“Go in peace” what lovely wisdom! Journey in peace, or let peace be your guide. Certainly as I have journeyed with Jesus there are things that used to bother me that don’t anymore and on the flip side new things are being brought to my attention! I like to think that as Naaman’s faith grew he may have had a conversation with his king to explain his new position.

Isn’t God’s grace amazing!



Love your enemies!