

Sunday July 31st, 2016

[The power of the powerless, the powerless powerful](#)

[Luke 10:1-11, 16-20;](#)
[2 Kings 5:1-14](#)

I would like to look at both our Luke and 2nd Kings reading this morning because I think they relate in an interesting way.

In 2nd Kings we read about Naaman. He is an important commander in an army of one of Israel's neighbouring countries (modern Syria). In fact, he seems to have been an enemy (at least at one time) since he stole an little Israelite girl in one of his raids, which means he or one of his men may have killed her parents. He kidnapped this little girl and made her a slave for his wife.

This powerful man is powerless when it comes to his health. He has leprosy. In Israel, and I suspect in the surrounding cultures, this was more than a skin disease. In Israel, Leprosy also meant you were quarantined. You were separated from your family and friends and the rest of the community. You became an outsider. You lost everything. I'm not sure what this meant for Naaman, as he was from a different people and a different religion, but it seemed to be serious enough that he was desperate for a cure. So when this little Israelite slave girl offers hope in the form of prophet of the God of Israel, Naaman jumps at the chance. He follows the word of a little slave girl.

Naaman approaches his king, who then gives him permission to

go to Israel. The king sends gifts, money and clothing (750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, 10 sets of clothes), as well as a letter to the King of Israel. One important and powerful man sends his commander to another important and powerful man assuming he has power to command and control the prophet. The king of Israel finds himself helpless to heal the commander, Naaman. Just as the great commander Naaman found himself helpless when faced with his Leprosy, so the great king of Israel found himself helpless when faced with Naaman's leprosy.

The prophet Elisha hears about Naaman and sends a message to the king to send Naaman to him. Naaman's procession, his horses and chariots full of money, and servants arrive at Elisha's door. The important and great commander arrives at the door of the prophet and Elisha doesn't even go out to meet him. He sends his servant to tell Naaman to wash in a muddy river. Naaman is offended that the prophet doesn't put on a dramatic show, or even come out to meet him in person. Naaman is so offended he is ready to leave. But his servant stops him with the thought, "if the Prophet asked you to do a difficult thing wouldn't you have done it? Why not do this easy thing". Naaman follows the prophet's direction and he is healed.

Notice where Naaman would be without the slaves and servants. The slave girl who mercifully told him about the prophet. The servant who gave the message to the king of Israel to send Naaman to Elisha. The servant who gave Naaman Elisha's message to wash in the Jordan River. The servant who convinced the indignant Naaman to turn back and try the cure he was too offended to try. All the way along it is slaves and servants who make the healing possible. As we read the Bible

we will see this thread running through it. God uses the little and seemingly unimportant. God identifies with the little and seemingly unimportant. God chooses a people for himself- a nation of slaves in Egypt. Little David defeats the giant Goliath. Jesus is born the son of two people who would otherwise disappear into the mists of time. Jesus chooses followers from fishermen and tax collectors.

Now when we use this lens to look at Luke 10 we find this same thread. Jesus sends 70 disciples to go ahead of him into the places Jesus will be going. He says the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few, so they are being warned that there is too much work for so few of them. Then he tells them he is sending them out as lambs in the midst of wolves. They are going out purposefully vulnerable. They are to not carry money, nor a bag, nor even sandals. They are sent out completely reliant on the kindness of others. They aren't to greet anyone on the road. Middle Eastern customs of hospitality say that greeting someone on the road could possibly mean staying at the person's home for a few days. Jesus wants them to be focused. When they get where they are going, they will enter a house and will offer peace hoping the host will offer the same. They are looking for people of peace. They will remain with their host rather than jump from house to house seeking better meals or more spacious arrangements. They remain with who offered them hospitality first and will eat and drink whatever is offered to them. They come with an incredible vulnerability- reliant on the kindness of strangers for a place to sleep and for food and water.

It is out of this position that they go about doing the work of the Kingdom. Jesus tells them to cure the sick and to tell them "The

kingdom of God has come near to you”. And Jesus will so identify himself with his disciples that whoever welcomes them, welcomes him, and whoever rejects them, rejects him.

When we read Luke 10 and we try to find ourselves in it, I believe the only place we can see ourselves is as the 70 disciples. We are disciples of Jesus. There is no such thing as a Christian that is not also a disciple of Jesus. So what might Jesus be saying to us through this?

One thing I think he’s saying is get rid of this idea that you have to be “a somebody” to do his work. Sometimes we think, “well, who am I that God would have me do something like that?” But, that is exactly who God uses in his work. Sometimes we think we have to have a degree in theology, or be a professional speaker, or an incredible musician, or whatever. Even Moses told God to find someone better because he wasn’t a good speaker. Some think he had some sort of speech impediment. So, if you think you aren’t “anyone special” then you are exactly the kind of person God works through.

Another thing we learn is that we don’t have to have big expensive programs to do the work of the kingdom. The disciples were sent out in poverty- no money, no bag, not even sandals. To survive they had to eat what others gave them and sleep where there was an offer. We would want to raise a large sum of money to pay for their food and maybe get a tour bus, or at least pay for hotels for them. We would want to put on a large show- special lighting, musicians, videos, posters, radio ads, etc. The disciples went out in simple poverty looking for people of peace who would be willing to have an open ear and an open

heart to what they are saying about Jesus and his Kingdom.

If we don't think we are anyone special, and if we don't feel like we have the resources to do anything special, then that is exactly how Jesus sent his disciples out. It may be how he wants to send us out.

What we do need is the courage to be vulnerable and to find people of peace who are willing to receive us. If people are not open to you, they are not people of peace, move on until you find people of peace who are open- who the Holy Spirit has prepared. We need the courage to accept the hospitality of those we wish to serve. We have to have the courage to see what God is up to around us without having things under our control. We need to get out of our safe bubble if we want to be a part of what God is up to.

As a church we lament that our culture seems to be rejecting the Gospel. When you watch television Christianity is constantly shown in a negative light. Crystal and I used to play a game when we watch late night TV- especially crime drama. When a pastor or priest appeared we would guess if he was a pedophile, a murderer, a thief, a Satanist, or just a naïve moron. 99% of the time he was one of those. Representations of Christians (and their leaders) on TV are becoming increasingly negative and show us to be out of touch with reality, foolish, or even dangerous. A former head of Religion and Ethics at the BBC, Michael Wakelin, commented that, "in 1986, religion was certainly more high-profile on TV...I'm afraid the media do tend to treat religion as a problem, and only as a problem. In some ways, [it is] like only covering football from the point of

view of hooliganism and never actually showing the game being played”.[\[1\]](#) When most people in our culture wake up on Sunday morning church doesn’t even pass into their minds as a possibility for how they might spend their morning.

Now, I’m not necessarily saying go and invite people to church. I’m also not saying we should hand out tracts, or tell everyone you meet about the 4 Spiritual Laws. I don’t think we should have a pre-packaged plan. ... I’m saying that we need to start thinking about ourselves as missionaries in a foreign culture. Just as missionaries would have gone off into foreign countries to do the work of the Kingdom, so we are now (I believe) being invited to be doing the work of the Kingdom where we are.

What does it mean to do the work of the kingdom where we are? It might mean finding ways to get to know your neighbours- maybe you have a block party. Maybe there is someone just up the street who is having a hard time getting along and could use a listening ear and a cup of tea, or someone to cut their grass. Maybe we need to walk around our block, or up and down the hallway, praying for our neighbours. Maybe we need to pray for eyes to see people of peace in the places we spend our time- where we work, where we live, where we meet with friends, etc.

I’m not sure what God will show us, but we should also be a bit wary of having a plan. The disciples Jesus sent out didn’t know what they were walking into. So maybe we should pray and open ourselves to who God prompts us to meet. Eventually we might see how we can be people of the kingdom where we are. What does it mean for the kingdom to come for this person? Do they need emotional healing? Maybe they need a listening ear

and someone to pray for them- even if you pray for them secretly.

What does it mean to be God's people in the places where we are? What does it mean to be vulnerable with the people we meet? Jesus is calling us into uncomfortable and unknown situations. But if we are willing he will use us to do great things, just as God used servants to lead the commander Naaman to healing, so God will use us to lead others to healing. It will be risky, and we won't always have a plan, but we have Jesus' promise that he will be with us- so much so that to welcome us is to welcome him.

AMEN