

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 176

Sunday 9th October 2022

‘Virtually Church but with some way to go...’

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Sunday.

Scripture Passages

2 Kings 5: 1-3, 7-15c

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favour with his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy.

² Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman’s wife. ³ She said to her mistress, “If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.”

⁷ When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, “Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me.”

⁸ But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, “Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.” ⁹ So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha’s house. ¹⁰ Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, “Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.”

¹¹ But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, “I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! ¹² Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?” He turned and went away in a rage.

¹³ But his servants approached and said to him, “Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, ‘Wash, and be clean’?” ¹⁴ So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

¹⁵ Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, “Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel.”

Luke 17: 11-19

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³ they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

¹⁴ When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean.

¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶ He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan.

¹⁷ Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? ¹⁸ Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹ Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

Reflection

When those who in powerful or influential positions are suddenly faced with a need which they cannot meet they can find it difficult to adapt. A humility is required as they need to ask other people for their help and compassion. This requires a very different attitude to the one to which they are accustomed where they are in charge and tell other people what to do.

This was the position in which Naaman, a commander of the army of the king of Aram (now modern-day Syria) found himself. Militarily he was a very successful general. He was held in high regard by his king because of this success. Indeed he could justifiably be called a great man. And yet...

Naaman found himself suffering from leprosy, a debilitating and disfiguring disease for which there was no obvious cure and which was contagious. His condition meant that he had to keep his distance from other people in order to avoid spreading his terrible disease.

So what was he to do? He probably felt desperate but because of his important position no doubt did not wish to show this publicly. And so he hid this desperation beneath a display of status designed to impress and intimidate. This was, after all, what he had come to rely on to provide him with a sense of worth and identity.

So as he searches for a cure he turns up at the door of the prophet Elisha. We do not know what kind of house Elisha lived in but it was probably not very grand or impressive. Nevertheless Naaman turns up with all his impressive retinue, his horses and chariots, signs of his status. He wanted to show that despite his apparent vulnerability and weakness he was still the one who was in charge and who gives the orders.

And yet Elisha refuses to be impressed or intimidated. Naaman may be important but he is not given any special treatment because of this. Indeed

the prophet does not even come out of his house to greet him. Instead he gives his own straightforward order through a messenger. Naaman is to do the very everyday activity of washing in the river Jordan seven times and then healing will follow.

But this enrages Naaman. Believing that his status entitles him to special treatment, he is not prepared to follow these simple and undramatic instructions or to rely on a humble trust that God will be faithful to His word given through the prophet.

Rather he believes that for him Elisha should have come out in person, called on God and waved his hand in order to cure his leprosy. He knows exactly what Elisha should have done and because this has not happened, he goes off in a rage.

And then there is his sense of national pride. Surely the rivers of his own country are better than the river Jordan and all the other rivers in Israel. His own rivers would have served just as well for the purposes of the healing. What made the Jordan so special?

So people, like Naaman, who are in important and influential positions can find themselves curiously helpless when confronted with circumstances beyond their own control. We can see a similar helplessness on the part of a powerful man in the part that the king of Israel does (or does not) play in Naaman's healing.

The king sees everything through the eyes of a politician. He senses potential political disadvantage when presented with a request from his sworn national enemy Aram to heal their commander's leprosy. This request makes him feel powerless.

For the king realises that it is entirely beyond his capacity to heal Naaman. As he puts it, 'Am I God, to give death or life'. And he fears that this may be

just a political trap. Surely the king of Aram is simply looking for an excuse for fresh military action against Israel. So distraught does he become that he tears his clothes. The king simply does not know what to do.

So those who are powerful can find it difficult when they have to face suffering and circumstances which are beyond their own resources to deal with. For in these circumstances all the symbols of power, prestige and status on which they have relied prove to be of no use to them.

By contrast those who are accustomed to being powerless may paradoxically find themselves in a stronger position.

The young girl from Israel who has been taken captive by the Arameans and is now the servant of Naaman's wife appears to be a person without any power whatsoever. It would have been so easy for her to have seen herself as a helpless victim. And yet rather than falling into self-pity she looks outwards. In pure compassion she has seen Naaman and the suffering that his leprosy is causing him.

And then, again motivated by compassion, an idea comes to her and she mentions it to Naaman's wife. What if Naaman was to go to the prophet Elisha in her own country? Surely that might provide a cure. In all of this the young girl has nothing obvious to gain. She will not be given her freedom. But nevertheless in her state of captivity she is not powerless. Compassion has a power of its own and when exercised it enables God's miraculous power to be released.

Naaman's other servants also have a humble status with no obvious influence. They could be seen as being insignificant. And yet they too display compassion and so they also prove to be very significant in the working out of God's purposes. They observe how Naaman has simply gone away in a rage and how he has turned his back on this God given

opportunity of healing. Unlike their master, however, they patiently wait for God's timing and take God's opportunities.

And so when the time is right they come to Naaman and seek to persuade him to change his mind. They pose Naaman the question of whether he would not have obeyed the prophet if he had been asked to do something difficult. If he would, then why not obey a simple command which he is fully capable of carrying out such as washing in the Jordan seven times?

And Naaman is persuaded. However, without the intervention of the servants Naaman's miraculous healing would not have taken place. Once again we see the compassion which those who are insignificant and powerless can show and how greatly that can be used by God.

There are many parallels and echoes of the account of Naaman's healing to be found in the encounter between Jesus and the ten lepers in today's gospel reading.

The ten lepers are powerless people and in extreme need. Although they approach Jesus they dare not come too close. Such is the distance that this deeply disfiguring and contagious disease creates between them and their fellow human beings. They can only cry out in pure need 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us'. It is that simple cry of need in which we all share when we are sick or in danger whatever our position in life.

We find a parallel between the way in which Jesus responds to and heals the lepers and the way in which the prophet Elisha heals Naaman. In both cases they do not exercise healing directly, for instance by the laying on of hands or a word which commands healing. Instead both encourage those suffering from leprosy to take very ordinary and undramatic actions. Naaman is just to wash seven times in the river Jordan. The lepers whom Jesus meets are directed to go and show themselves to the priests in

accordance with the Old Testament law. Their healing simply takes place as they are on their way to do this.

So neither Elisha nor Jesus play much visible part in the healings. But both of them encourage faith on the part of those who are suffering and give them simple instructions which lie well within their capacity to carry out.

Why do the healings take place in this way? Surely to demonstrate that healing comes from God and through exercising faith in God rather than being the work of any specially gifted human being.

Elisha does not want Naaman to go away very impressed by Elisha's powers. Rather he wants him to go away trusting in God. Jesus, too, wants to make it quite clear that the healing comes through God's work alone rather than through any special formula that lies within human control.

And it is not just healing which Jesus offers. In Jesus' ministry healing is always an outward sign of something that is invisible and of even greater underlying importance. That is of our being drawn into the Kingdom of God and having the security of knowing that we have become a child of God.

For one of the lepers, who is a Samaritan, when he realises that he has been healed turns back to Jesus in praise. He falls at Jesus' feet as a sign of worship and thanksgiving.

So more than healing has taken place in this Samaritan leper's life. His faith has brought him to a living knowledge of God, to salvation and wholeness. All this is encompassed when Jesus sends the Samaritan leper away with the words 'your faith has made you well.' While the other nine who did not return to Jesus have indeed enjoyed physical healing the Samaritan leper has received so much more in spiritual terms.

And so too Naaman receives more than simply healing important though this is. When Naaman does what the prophet originally commanded him to do the miracle takes place. His flesh becomes like the flesh of a young boy, completely free from leprosy. But that is not the end of Naaman's story. He comes back to Elisha and makes a very clear confession of faith in God. So he too comes to faith and salvation and is transformed as a whole person.

I wonder who we identify with in Naaman's story. Do we see our responses and concerns reflected in Naaman, the king or the servants? Perhaps we are like a mixture of them in different ways and at different times.

And how is it that we expect God to work? Do we think we can control the way in which God will work? Are we looking for an impressive display which bolsters our own sense of importance or are we prepared to take the ordinary unspectacular steps that lie within our own capacity? There are indeed occasions when God chooses to work in dramatic and extraordinary ways but on others we simply need to do what we can and trust that God will do the rest.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- Being willing to take the simple steps in faith that God asks of us
- Our response to the cost of living and wider economic crisis
- Climate emergency
- Conflict between Russia and the Ukraine
- Those whom we know who are facing illnesses of all kinds and have recently been bereaved
- For the Deanery in considering Pastoral Reorganisation
- For Elliscombe House in Higher Holton and its first residents

- For teachers, children and parents of North Cadbury church school and other local schools
- Prayers and thanksgiving for contributions to the foodbanks and for those helping to take these to the foodbanks.

Hymn

A hymn chosen for this morning which reminds us of the Kingdom of God is 'Jesus shall reign where'er the sun.'

Services for this week and next

Sunday 9 th October	9.30 am Matins, Blackford
Sunday 9 th October	11.00 am Harvest Service, Galhampton
Sunday 9 th October	11.00 am Harvest Service, Holton
Sunday 9 th October	11.00 am Harvest Service, North Cheriton
Sunday 16 th October	9.30 am Communion, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 16 th October	11.00 am Harvest Service, Maperton
Sunday 16 th October	11.00 am Harvest Service, North Cadbury
Sunday 16 th October	6.30 pm Harvest Evensong, Yarlinton

Excalibur

Excalibur is back in paper form. It contains details of Camelot people, a record of baptisms, weddings and funerals undertaken through the church in the Camelot Parishes. The October edition of Excalibur has now been published online at camelotparishes.co.uk.

The Parish Office

If Rob is not in the Office during normal office hours please contact him via email (office@camelotparishes.org.uk) or on 01749 850934.

Growing as a worshipper, a servant and a family

*We pray that 'we might live in love,
as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us'*

(Ephesians 5: 2)