

St Nicholas' Anglican Church, Mordialloc, Sunday 7th July, 2019 (Fourth Sunday after Pentecost)

Revd Dr Sharne Rolfe, Vicar

Readings:

2 Kings 5:1-14

Psalm 30

Galatians 6:7-18

Luke 10:1-12, 17-14

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

Sermon: Keeping it simple

As I was reflecting on the Old Testament reading for today, the story of the healing Naaman from the second Book of Kings, I couldn't help thinking how unnecessarily complicated we humans can make things for ourselves. Naaman, we are told, is a great man, a successful commander of the army of the king of Aram, and in high favour indeed with his king because of his successes in battle. But despite his greatness and his many successes, all is not well with Naaman. He might be a great man, a successful army commander, and well thought of in high places. But in other respects he's doing it tough. He has leprosy, a vile disease. It can't have been pleasant. In our story from 2 Kings we are told how Naaman ends up in the land of Israel, in front of the prophet Elisha's house, seeking healing. Elisha tells him, not in person, but via a messenger, to go and wash in the Jordan River seven times, so that he may be healed. It isn't quite what Naaman was expecting. In fact, he is none too impressed that Elisha does not come out and stand before him with all the anticipated drama of a miraculous healing, calling on the name of God, and waving his hands about theatrically. Naaman goes away, not just unimpressed but in an arrogant rage. He might easily have lost the chance to be well. But fortunately, Naaman's servants have

the wisdom and humility to caution their master on his response, urging him to do as Elisha has told him to do. As they say, “Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it?”

Like so many of us, Naaman is unnecessarily complicating his life. As the wise old saying goes - if there are two options, the easy way and the hard way, some people will always choose the hard way! May be you're one of them? Naaman is looking for life to be more difficult, more complicated than it needs to be. He finds taking the easy option, a straightforward healing handed to him on a silver platter so to speak, almost impossible to take up. But thanks to the wisdom of his slaves, he ends up having a change of heart, washing himself in the Jordan seven times as Elisha had told him to do. And, just like that, we are told his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was healed.

2 Kings is the twelfth book of the Old Testament as we know it. It begins by describing the exploits of two great prophets, Elijah and Elisha. Prophets are God's representatives on earth, often called to speak out against evil, wrong doing and corruption. It is a costly business, being a prophet, and all does not always go well for these two prophets in particular. People in power only like to hear what they want to hear, and prophets are called upon to say it like it really is, delivering sometimes the most unpalatable of views. 2 Kings traces two lines of kings, one in the northern kingdom of Israel and the other in the southern kingdom of Judah. Although Judah in general fared better, because at least some of its kings were faithful, doing what was right in the sight of the Lord, in the end Judah was conquered by Babylon in 586 BC. Israel was crushed by Assyria in 722 BC.

But back to the story of Naaman, and our all too human tendency to make life more complicated for ourselves than necessary. Sometimes, we can make life unnecessarily complicated because we misinterpret someone else's intentions. That's here in our OT story as well. When Naaman presents his letter asking for healing from the king of Aram to the king of Israel, the king of Israel completely misconstrues the motivation

of the king of Aram, tearing his clothes and saying “Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me.” As far as we can tell, this wasn’t the intention of the king of Aram at all. Other times, like Namaan standing in front of Elisha’s house, expecting him to come out and offer healing in a dramatic way, we take offence at something when no offence was meant. Elisha was a busy man, he sent a messenger with all the information Naaman needed to be healed. He was keeping it simple; its unlikely he meant offence. And sometimes we look for the complicated, difficult way forward, even when the simple, easy, straightforward way is laid out plainly for us. So a lot of wisdom for us to take today from this story of Namaan in 2 Kings: perhaps best summed up by: Keep it simple!

The Christian life can at times seem complicated - we can struggle with how to respond in a godly way in certain situations; we can struggle to discern what is good and what is evil, to discriminate between what is Godly and what is sinful. Our text from last week, in Galatians 5, helps us as we look for the fruits of actions - are they the fruits of the Spirit, or the fruits of the flesh? In Galatians 6, that we heard in our second reading today, Paul reduces the rules down even further when he says: “May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!”

A new creation is everything! Paul must have felt enormous frustration at times. Having made converts to the way of Christ in Galatia and other places, other missionaries followed him there, undermining the gospel he had preached, urging the Galatians to submit to the demands of the Mosaic Law, particularly regarding circumcision. Never one to mince words, Paul addresses the converts, calling them “You stupid Galatians”! He argues that only faith in Christ will justify them in God’s eyes, only faith will lead them to freedom. And in his own way of keeping it simple, Paul tells them that the whole law is summed up in a single commandment: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

So let us try to avoid over-complicating our life, our life of Christian living. Let us remember Paul's near-final words to the Galatians, that we reap what we sow. We reap what we sow. And let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time if we do not give up. Thanks be to God!

+ In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.