

Proper 9C, Saint John's Olney, 7 July 2019
The Reverend Henry P. McQueen
2 Kings 5:1-14; Psalm 30; Galatians 6:7-16; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

S.D.G.

One of the pleasant benefits of being associated with a parish school is hearing some of the stories about the kids, and the teaching moments that occur. Take for instance the teacher who noticed a young girl intently focused on her work. The girl was drawing furiously, and nothing distracted her. The teacher approached the young girl and asked 'what are you drawing?' to which the girl replied 'I am drawing God.' Somewhat surprised the teacher said 'but no one knows what God looks like.' Without missing a beat the young girl responded 'they will in a minute.'

After a long vacation I thought we needed to ease into the sermon because there is a lot going on in our reading from 2nd Kings. The story focuses on Naaman, a great military commander in the Syrian army. Naaman has contracted leprosy, which, for anyone else in society, would be a social death sentence.

On one of their raids into Israel, the Syrians captured a young girl to serve as a slave to Naaman's wife. It was this young girl who said that the prophet Elisha would be able to heal the leprosy.

With these words of hope the king dispatched Naaman along with gifts and a military escort to Samaria. The king in Samaria reluctantly received Naaman but feared his presence was a pretense to battle. Hearing this, the prophet Elisha sent a message to the king saying that Naaman should be sent to him, and by this Naaman will learn that there is a prophet in Israel and not attack.

Surprisingly, Elisha did not receive Naaman but instead by messenger told him to bath in the Jordan seven times. Naaman thought this ridiculous because the rivers of Damascus are far better than anything in Israel. Urged by his servants to follow the commands of the prophet, Naaman was healed and made clean.

In these 14 verses we could discuss the baptismal like cleansing of the waters of the Jordan. We could talk about the actions of the two kings. We could discuss how

Elisha sought to humble the mighty army commander Naaman by not welcoming him and instead sending him a message that commanded him to wash in the Jordan. Or we could look beyond this passage and in the following verses see how Naaman has accepted that there is one true God, the God of Israel. There is a lot going on in these 14 verses.

Key to this story though are the actions of a few un-named characters. Without the voice of the slave girl from Israel proclaiming that there is a prophet in Samaria who could heal Naaman there would be no hope and no story. And then, when Naaman learns that he is simply to wash in the Jordan River he turns away in a fit of rage only to be confronted by his own servants who calm him and encourage him to follow the commands of the prophet.

It was the words and actions of servants, the least of society, the nameless in the story, who made it possible for Naaman to be healed. The captive slave girl from Israel spoke up and proclaimed the God of Israel and the prophet Elisha. The servants of Naaman stopped their master in his fit of rage and led him to the Jordan to bathe. Without the voices of these servants the story would have had a very different ending. Without the voices of these servants Naaman would not have been made clean and would not have come to believe in the one true God.

These nameless, and powerless, voices spoke up and Naaman's world was forever changed.

So what we see is that the teacher who told her young student that 'no one knows what God looks like' was right. And the young girl who was drawing a picture of God and said 'they will know in a minute what God looks like' was also right.

We saw the face of God in the servant girl who proclaimed the one true God of Israel and the prophet Elisha. We saw the face of God in the servants who led their master to the Jordan River. God speaks to us and the face we see, and the voice we hear, is our neighbor. It may be the neighbor who we like very much, even someone in the next pew. But it is just as likely to be our homeless neighbor, or our immigrant neighbor, or the neighbor who really gets under our skin.

Two weeks ago Diane and I worshiped in the small parish of Saint John's Ingonish Nova Scotia, and we heard the same lessons that you heard that day. The lesson was from 1st Kings – the prophet Elijah stood on the mountain waiting for the Lord to pass. There was a great wind, and following the wind an earthquake, and then a fire. But the Lord was not in the wind, nor the earthquake, nor the fire. The Lord was in the sheer silence that followed.

In our passage today from 2nd Kings, the voice of the Lord did not come from army commander or king, the voice of the Lord was not heard with the force of wind, earthquake, or fire. In our passage today the voice of the Lord was heard within the silent voices of the servants.

Naaman was not particularly prepared to listen, yet he heard the voice of the Lord speaking to him through the message sent by the prophet Elisha, and more surprisingly, through the voices of those he would say had no voice, the servants.

This is often the case. The unexpected and silent voices of our own world can be the voices of God, the messengers that God uses to guide us. God often speaks through the chance encounters and the unexpected people in our lives.

“The Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.” Saint Luke is likely referencing Genesis 10 where the seventy grandsons of Noah are each sent out into the world. But we also know that numerics in the Bible can not always be taken literally so sometimes we have to be content to know that 70 means “a lot”. There have been, and always will be, a lot of small voices in our lives who speak to us the word of the Lord. God speaks to each of us through unexpected voices.

And we may also be that unexpected voice for others.

Jesus sent out seventy others to all the places He intended to go; which is to say that Jesus sent out many to all the world.

The voice of God does not necessarily have a podium to speak from, and if God speaks to you as God often does, it will come from the most unlikely of people at the most unexpected times.

“Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” In the name of God much can be accomplished.

Amen,