

Order of Service for PMC video and Trinity (Sunday 30th August)

Call to Worship (Psalm 139: 1-6)

You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.
You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

Readings: 2 Kings 5: 1-14

Luke 14.1,7-14

Reflection

It's really easy to be critical of Naaman, perhaps even a little cross with him. After all, he's a popular and wealthy man, and in a society where leprosy might have made him a social outcast, he is the commander of a powerful army – an owner of slaves. He's fortunate in a world where so many lack basic necessities. He has a home and knows where his next meal is coming from. From a man of such importance it's not really surprising that when a slave girl mentions someone with the gift of healing Naaman assumes it must be someone 'important', like a king, and that the experience will be theatrical, magnificent and require him to do something far more difficult than take a dip in a river. After all, that's what he deserves as a powerful man which such a life-transforming disease.

At the very least, Naaman expects to meet the healer in person!

Am I allowed to say that a miraculous healing is 'boring'? I'm not sure, but I'll take the risk. Naaman's healing is almost boring. No pomp and ceremony – not even a face-to-face meeting. 'Wash seven times in the Jordan and you'll be clean', writes Elisha, the prophet of God.

You know that feeling you get when you're having trouble with the computer, or the phone or the TV; when you've been pressing buttons for what feels like hours and getting nowhere fast, so you contact someone else (preferably aged 8-12) for help? Press this, this and this, they say, and suddenly it's all fixed and you're left wondering what even just happened? Well, I think Naaman would understand that feeling.

He's a blindsided and confused by Elisha's words. Now, I'm not saying Naaman's right to be so irritated, I think in his position I'd have muttered something under my breath, bit my lip and done as I was told – who knows, it might work. But how can it

possibly be that simple? This horrible disease cured by a bathe in some silly river? How can an eight-year-old whose never even seen my television know why my iPlayer isn't working?

True story. But anyway...

Naaman sulks, a lot, before being reluctantly talked round.

The healing miracle may not be exactly Hollywood material, and Naaman may be apparently arrogant and prone to temper tantrums, but there are two extraordinary things about this passage that are easily overlooked.

First: Naaman and his wife could easily have disregarded the suggestion of a little foreign slave girl. She's just a child, and she worships a different God. Sweet that she cares enough about her master to want to see him cured, but really, what would she know? Yet they recognise wisdom when they hear it from unexpected lips. They don't understand it – Naaman ends up going to the wrong person – but they do listen. They do try.

Second: It's easy not to notice the circumstances of Naaman's healing. While he's having his little strop there is a servant at his side taking it all in. 'But Master,' he says, 'if you were asked to do something difficult you would do it. Why not do this simple thing?' This time, Naaman might have taken his anger out on his servant for daring to question him. How dare he? But he sees the truth of the words and in doing so allows himself to be healed.

Naaman may be many things, but he does recognise wisdom. He hears the word of God from unexpected lips even if he might not view it as such. He's perceptive enough to take people as they are rather than disregard them because of society's perceptions. Yes, Elisha is a prophet of God and a healer, a big name in Scripture, but here we see God is using slave and servant just as clearly.

It's hard for those of us who learned Scripture in Sunday School and know these passages to read them as if for the first time but if you can, next time you pick up a bible, try and pretend this is all new to you, because a cursory flick through the parables and miracles of Jesus more than reminds us of this. Like in any good novel, it's almost always the characters who blend into the background, or who seem unimportant, who turn out to be not far from the Kingdom of God.

And it's true for us today. How many times over the years have you heard someone say 'I'm only a... cleaner... carer... nurse... binman...' and how completely and utterly lost would we have been in all these months without those very people? How many times have you said 'I'm only a... whatever' without pausing to think of just how precious you are and how much God is already using you?

The slave and the servant spoke out and became part of the miracle. Their voices were important. Your voice is important.

Prayers for the World

Gracious God, there is so much we could say about all that's going on in this world you created. We know that even as we hold it before you, you already know its

struggles. Yet we bring them, asking that you will use us to answer our own prayers and those of others.

For countries where good health care is difficult to access. Especially those ravaged by Covid or other more localised diseases such as malaria.

Silence

For those who hold positions of leadership, that they may lay aside prejudice.

Silence

For children and young people, parents, teachers and other staff as they prepare to return to school.

Silence

For our own communities. Remembering especially those who are anxious, lonely or troubled.

Silence

For our own fellowship and the other churches in Portsmouth, that we may be united in sharing your gospel.

Silence

For any who we know to be in need.

Silence

For ourselves.

Silence

Our Lord's Prayer

Blessing

'The Lord bless you
and keep you;

The Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;

the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.'