

## Sermon

### ***Send out Harvesters***

**2 Kings 5:1-14 ; Luke 1:1-20**

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The girl was an evangelist! What girl? The slave girl in the account of Naaman. She knew something which would help her master and she told him about it. What courage! There she was a slave – liable to punishment even death at her master's whim yet she urged her master to seek healing from the prophet in Israel.

What if Naaman were turned away? What if Elisha could not heal him? What wrath would be visited upon her? But she trusted which is a major part of faith. A compassionate and faithful girl indeed!

The Aramites have been at war with Israel. But General Naaman goes to Israel and he asks for healing. To go to your enemy and ask for healing is extraordinary – is that not faith? And did you hear the list of gifts he took? The silver he took would be worth about \$NZ 250,000 these days and the gold - \$NZ 4.6million!

When the general and his attendants arrive at the prophet's door, Elisha doesn't even come out but simply passes word that Naaman should wash seven times in the Jordan. Eventually – reluctantly -he obeys, is cleansed and his skin is restored like that of a young boy.

Naaman had protested that the Jordan River was nothing much – not worth washing in. But that was not the point – it was an act of obedience and faith. I remember a church camp up the Kauranga Valley. We were praying in small groups for people's needs. A woman was suffering from strong pain in her eyes and said that she just wanted the pain to go, she didn't care about the sight. We asked God for direction. Someone remembered Jesus spitting on the ground, making mud and wiping it on a blind man's eyes. "O dear!" I thought, "this could get weird!" We were waiting awkwardly wondering what to do, when the lady announced that she knew she had to stand outside in the rain and let the rainwater wash her eyes.

It was bucketing down. So we dressed her up in a number of raincoats and she went outside and looked straight up at the sky for a while. Then she came back under the veranda. When I asked her, how her eyes were, she said, "the pain's gone of course," and looked most surprised at my question.

She had trusted her impression – there it is - trusting faith. I don't think the actions of Naaman washing in the Jordan or that woman letting the rain fall into her eyes, were in themselves healing. But they were actions obeying God and he used them to make some faith-healing connection with them.

Naaman was healed and we learn later he was also converted when he promised to serve no other God but the God of Israel.

These were people who trusted God and acted: the girl, Naaman, his king, Elisha, the servants who persuaded Naaman to wash in the Jordan, and Naaman as he did it. In the end, the little evangelist had been successful in bringing healing of both body and spirit. She had told a needy person the good news.

The gospel reading tells of Jesus sending 72 men out to the villages of Galilee. These were not the twelve but an outer ring of followers. Their commission was to heal the sick and to declare that the Kingdom of God had come near. The healings would be proof that God's reign was active. Do you notice the great authority he gives them?

Verse 16: "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

In other words, they were his ambassadors representing him.

As Jesus commissioned them we can learn some helpful principles. The harvest belongs to God and he directs it. We are to ask him to send labourers and he sends them in pairs – this is not about lone rangers. We need to ask God to send labourers into his harvest here in Whangaparaoa as well as further afield. If we had more helpers we could do more here. Will you pray for the Lord of the harvest to send out more labourers into our harvest field? We have just had the Pais team labourers – now they have gone home we need more released somehow to work with our outreaches and voluntary roles. Maybe you are one who has not been released yet – now there's a thought!

They were to travel very lightly yet not all these provisions were universal. Before Gethsemane, Jesus adjusted the instructions for a subsequent times saying,

"When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?" "Nothing," they answered. <sup>36</sup> He said to them, "But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one."<sup>1</sup>

The basic principles of entering a village, staying where we are invited, eating what we are given, offering healing and declaring the Kingdom of God is near is the way we have learnt to minister in Africa. We go to a village and demonstrate healing and deliverance – that makes the people see that this gospel has reality and power; God's rule changes things as it brings freedom for body and soul. Then they want to know; then they want to be Christians.

My colleague, Andrew Allan-Johns, told us that in 2017, Bishop Given sent his team to a village in Kondoa where the gospel had only been preached 5 months before. He wrote:

Our pattern on arrival was to receive the hospitality of the village, declare that the kingdom has come near then invite the sick to stand for healing. All that was required was to declare healing over them and a touch on the forehead for most to receive significant healing.

Andrew then explained how he proceeded to teach them about healing and the authority believers have and then get them praying for each other. This is what Helen and I have been teaching each time we go there. Andrew continued:

[There was] a Maasai camp called Masada, a 45 minutes off road drive into the hills along a bicycle track. The church was newly planted this year and meets under a tree next to the house of their chief, Isaya. In gospel terms he was the person of peace who had welcomed the gospel. The congregation was made up of his family and other Maasai, together with the surrounding Gogo people. ... The pastor told us that very few of the people had been baptized and the Sunday attendances were small.

Andrew announced the Kingdom of God was near and asked for the blind and the deaf to be brought out for prayer. One of the women starting barking like a dog as a demon manifested. The villagers said this had happened for years. Andrew and his team drove the demon out of the woman and she was set free. The next day they baptized 25 people including the chief. Andrew was told the following Sunday 70 more people were baptized. That church was taking off!

When Jesus' followers returned they rejoiced at the healings and that demons had to obey them. Jesus observed:

"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. <sup>19</sup> I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. <sup>20</sup> However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 22:35-36

<sup>2</sup> Luke 10:18-20

We Westerners may be uncomfortable with this idea but when you are in the front line of ministry in the Third World or here in the Western world, you have to deal with such things – they are real, troublesome for some people and we are the only people who can help people get free.

There is another uncomfortable portion of this reading. The lectionary omits it – and Bishop Peter Carrell of Christchurch says it does us a disservice in leaving it out.

<sup>10</sup> But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup> 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.' <sup>12</sup> I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. <sup>13</sup> "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>14</sup> But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. <sup>15</sup> And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths.

Capernaum is where Jesus based his ministry. Bethsaida is a few miles around the shore of the lake; Korazin a short distance inland. These were places which had a lot of exposure to his teaching and ministry. He warns that they would be judged for rejecting him and his message. They had the evidence of the miracles in their midst but refused to believe. Shocking Jesus referred to the Day of Judgement and said they would be judged more severely than the pagan towns of Tyre and Sidon up on the coast which were regarded as wicked and immoral places. Even worse, he said the watchword of corruption, Sodom, would be better off than towns that rejected the Kingdom message the 72 were to carry. Capernaum would not be lifted up to the skies but go down to the depths – more literally in Greek – to Hades, the place of the dead.

It is not a popular topic. People want to say God is love and so could not have such a thing. If that is your idea, let me ask you. Do you think Jesus was loving? Do you realise that he spoke more of hell than anyone else in the scripture. He was warning of something he believed to be important and dangerous. If there is no judgment he paid a terrible price to save us from nothing. But if there is a judgement, we cannot ignore it. There is something to be saved from.

We must tell others about Jesus and his salvation. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."<sup>3</sup> The whole thrust of the Bible is that there is a problem – we are separated from God by our sins. We try and fail to bridge that gap. There is only one solution to the problem and He is Jesus. But it is not enough that the solution exists, we need to ask for his salvation and trust that his death for us is enough.

So many people don't understand. So many reject Christianity thinking it is just about being a good person. They have no idea. They may think they can never be good enough. They may think it is empty of promise because they have never seen the real thing. Whatever the reason, they don't know and it is our responsibility to tell people.

Have you ever surrendered to Christ? If so, who told you about him? Who broke the taboo of speaking about spiritual things to you? Are you grateful for that person? Would you do the same for someone else?

There are opportunities. As they come, let's push our personal boundaries further out and try things we have not done before. The risk involved in NZ, is nothing compared with that for Naaman's slave. She could have been beaten or even killed. We only risk embarrassment.

I am going to ask God for an opportunity to tell someone about what Jesus has done for them – will you do the same? I'd love to hear how it went when you have done so.

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 4:12