

## Readings for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

6<sup>th</sup> July 2025

### First Reading: 2 Kings 5:1-14

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. 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. She said to her mistress, 'If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.' So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. And the king of Aram said, 'Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel.'

He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, 'When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy.' 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.'

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.' So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. 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.' 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! 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. 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"?' 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.

### Second Reading: Galatians 6:7-16

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand! It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised – only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. 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! As for those who will follow this rule – peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

Gospel: St Luke 10:1-11,16-20

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. He said to them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, “Peace to this house!” And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you.

Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.” But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, “Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.”

Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.’

The seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!’ He said to them, ‘I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.’

**A Reflection for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost**

Many of you, I am sure, will have heard of a phenomenon known as the ‘butterfly effect’. The example that gives the idea its name is that of a butterfly, flapping its wings and moving the air in one place, which ends up causing a tornado in another part of the world. Although some dispute this possibility, the theory is that, in the right conditions, a very small change can, by a series of increasingly significant knock-on effects, have a very large effect somewhere else.

A few years ago, I came across a different phenomenon dubbed the ‘Attenborough effect’. It refers to the increase in awareness of environmental issues and the need for sustainability resulting from the work, particularly his many TV series, and campaigning of Sir David Attenborough. The Attenborough effect is considered to have led to a significant increase in interest in related fields of study, particularly among young people, and resulted in changes in consumer behaviour, with greater use of environmentally friendly products and reductions in the quantity of plastic waste generated.

When I was young, we had a book of children’s Bible stories which included the story of Naaman the Aramean that we heard this morning. Of how Naaman, the important commander who has leprosy is sent to the prophet Elisha to be cured, albeit causing a certain amount of distress to the King of Israel on the way. But Naaman is initially too grand

and angry to do what Elisha suggests until his servants brought him to his senses, and he was healed. A timely reminder to us perhaps not to get above ourselves, that sometimes we are called to do simple things. And there is truth in that.

But in this story, the character I was always drawn to was the young Israelite girl, perhaps because I was young at the time. It appalled me that a young girl should be taken as a captive and a slave, far away from her home and family. Although, in such circumstances, she might not be very favourably disposed towards her captors, she did know a possible solution to Naaman's problem, someone who could cure his leprosy, and she had the confidence to speak up. This un-named young slave-girl was the only one who could do this, and her small act had a big effect on Naaman's life, and presumably on that of his family and nation also.

In our Gospel reading, we have the account of the sending out of the seventy, or the seventy-two in some versions. This is a parallel of the sending out of the twelve at the beginning of the previous chapter. The numbers twelve and seventy are significant, as numbers in the Bible always are. The twelve apostles can be understood as representing the twelve tribes of Israel, God's chosen people, and their sending out as the mission to Israel. The seventy sent out here represent the mission to the rest of the world, which remains the task of the church to this day. Both groups were told to take nothing with them, to stay where they were made welcome and shake the dust from themselves in places where they were not welcome. They were to be totally dependent on God. We don't know if they departed with confidence, but they certainly came back brimming with it.

However, the purpose of their mission was not to do amazing things, though some of those happened. It was to prepare the way for Jesus himself. We are told: '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.' As individuals in their pairs, they all had small parts to play that would lead to something much bigger. We could call it the 'Jesus effect'. And, as we know, the 'Jesus effect' went on to have huge and lasting effects for the whole world. True, Christians and the church have not always acted rightly, but much good has been done, and continues to be done, in many places. In this country, where the church is often side-lined, and it can be hard to speak out, we can forget that the church continues to grow in other parts of the world and Christianity is still the largest world religion.

In our lives, we in our turn are put in places and situations to further God's kingdom – to let 'Jesus effect' continue. Sometimes this is on our own, as it was for the young Israelite girl, sometimes it is together – as the seventy were sent out in pairs. For the vast majority of us, our task is not literally to cure the sick and to cast out demons, but to do so metaphorically by doing those things that improve situations. The kind words and deeds that bring happiness and joy, or bring peace by diffusing arguments. Or maybe we help the 'Attenborough effect' by reducing our use of plastics to improve the environment. Or buy fair-trade rice to help a farmer in Malawi send a child to school. Or fund-raise for a charity that provides new opportunities for the disadvantaged.

Paul writes about how Christians should live in the passage from Galatians where he says 'Bear one another's burdens' and then, apparently contradictorily, 'all must carry their own loads'. The mission of Jesus requires a team effort. There is a balance to be struck between helping others and taking responsibility for our own part. Sometimes we will see the effect of what we do and sometimes not. But not seeing it doesn't mean there is no effect. Like the butterfly effect, the effect we contribute to may be not here and may be not now.

These passages also come with a caution and a promise, neither of which we should ignore. The seventy came back to Jesus full of stories of wonderful things that happened. But Jesus said 'Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.' In other words, don't let this go to your heads. This is not you but God working through you. God can make use of you if you will let Him. Paul also warned against pride 'if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves.' And he reminded his audience that 'you reap whatever you sow.' If you sow barley seeds, barley comes up. If you sow weed seeds, weeds come up. Similarly, if you sow good behaviour and right living, you get the expected reward – eternal life. Or as Jesus put it 'your names are written in heaven.'

So, let us, as Paul says, 'not weary in doing what is right' and 'let us work for the good of all.' Don't be sucked into mindsets that say, 'I can't do everything, so I won't do anything', or 'the little I can do won't make any difference'. Our calling is not to be able to do everything, it's to do what we can, in the places and situations we find ourselves, to have the confidence to do so knowing that God is with us and works through us. Like the young Israelite girl in the story of Naaman, have the confidence that you may be the only person who can take a certain step, do something, say something. When we take those individual small steps, together we contribute to the much larger effect – the Jesus effect – the bringing in of God's kingdom on earth.