



**Sunday, 13 October 2019 – Trinity 17**  
**Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey**  
**Readings: 2 Kings 5: 1-3, 7-17; Gospel St Luke 17: 11-19**  
**Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard**

### **Unexpected sources of wisdom**

I absolutely adore the Matt cartoons in the Daily Telegraph. Time after time, Matt so brilliantly puts his finger on the pulse of society with a simply styled but well executed illustration. He has the glorious gift of highlighting trenchant issues that divide society and yet both sides enjoy his humour. One morning some years ago sitting at my office desk, I laughed out loud when I saw a particular cartoon, which today is illustrative of how times have moved on. It depicted a boardroom with male directors flanking the male chairman who sat at the head of the boardroom table. Their eyes, were all focused on the female secretary and expressed astonishment. The caption, spoken by the chairmen, said:

“Well done Miss Triggs, an excellent suggestion, now would one of you gentlemen like to think of it?”

Quite often the message we most need to hear is delivered by the person from whom we least expect to hear it. In Naaman's case, as we heard in the Old Testament reading, a servant girl was that person. She was a captive from the enemy Israelite country, a mere nonentity for we don't even know her name. What could she possibly know about anything? And yet, God chose this most humble and vulnerable person to be the agent of his mercy and grace.

### **Assessing the situation judiciously**

The young servant girl is shrewd, she does not approach Naaman directly but drops a word in his wife's ear. It's a truism that wives can often tread where angels fear to and so she conveys to Naaman the possibility of a cure for his leprosy. In short order, Naaman finds himself consulting a prophet of the self-same enemy country from which the servant-girl has been captured. The conquering hero has become beholden to the one he holds captive.

### **Accepting vulnerability graciously**

Naaman must have been acutely conscious of his leprosy and doubtless tried to hide his vulnerability by feats of daring do in the service of his king. Ultimately, he comes to understand that trusting in his strength alone does not provide a resolution. The best policy is always to lay our burdens down, accept our vulnerability and trust to the God who knows all and sees all.

## **Finding out the hard way**

Naaman, however, has to learn the hard way. Instead of the prophet Elisha coming to meet him face-to-face, he merely sends a message via his servant. Naaman the mighty man of valour finds this totally demeaning. Further, the remedy for his skin condition was an affront in itself. "What! Bathe in a filthy, foreign river?" He is incandescent with rage at this degrading treatment for such a man of courage, energy, resolve and stature. Elisha, like the servant girl, has judged that the greatest block to Naaman's healing is his pride. Fortunately, his servants work on his psyche and Naaman relents and on rising from the river Jordan on the 7<sup>th</sup> time he is made whole and Naaman knows with absolute certainty that the God of Israel has cured him. The reading, both for givers and receivers of healing, delivers four important messages:

**1<sup>st</sup> Act with wisdom:** although, you may be the one to receive a God-given commission drawing on the collaborative strengths of others, can enable transformative action to be delivered to greater effect.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Get over your pride:** see yourself as God sees you, which is no better or worse than the next person. False pride prevents transformation.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Healing and wholeness takes perseverance:** Each time Naaman came out of the water from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> time he must have thought "What is the point of all this?" But he persevered and on the 7<sup>th</sup> time his scepticism turned to joy and belief that there is a God who hears all people.

**4<sup>th</sup> Praying for healing and wholeness can have surprising outcomes:** God always answers prayer, just not necessarily in the way we are expecting. What we most want is not necessarily what we most need. Physical healing is wonderful if it is granted us but, inevitably, as we grow older things begin to fail and we know that sooner or later we'll die, so healing is only ever temporary. Wholeness, however, goes right to the heart of our spirituality and relationship with God. Our greatest need is the realisation that we are vulnerable and dependant on him. We also need to have the grace to allow people to help us and by so doing, we enable their faith and ministry to flourish.

Our strength comes from the Lord and he gives to each of us according to our personal needs. Healing of the body is a joyful miracle but its effects are transient: wholeness of spirit, is a gift of God's covenantal relationship with us and an eternal gift of his grace. We see this in Naaman and, also, the Samaritan in the Gospel. They put their pride and also their prejudice aside and recognised that without God's grace they would have nothing worth celebrating. How tragic, therefore, that the nine Jews whom Jesus also healed do not recognise anything beyond their physical healing and hence do not return to give thanks.

Well-being is so different to healthy-being. True serenity comes from the confidence Christ brings to those who trust in him or, as today's Collect says:

'Our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you: pour your love into our hearts and draw us to yourself.' Amen