

Sermon – Pentecost 4

2 Kings 5.1-14, Galatians 6: 1-18, Luke 10:1-12, 17-24

Sing praises to the Lord, all you his faithful ones: and give thanks to his holy name. **Amen.**

The psalmist tells us to praise God and give thanks to his holy name so it's good to be back worshipping our glorious God with you, after two weeks road tripping up to northern NSW, visiting friends and family along the way. It's such a pleasure to connect with long standing friends including Leon's Novice Master from when he was in seminary and University friends of mine. The richness of enduring friendship is truly special. In it we get a taste of the relationship we can have with Jesus and through him the Father. It's something to rejoice over just as Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit in our Gospel reading today.

This week has been busy with funeral and service preparation, catching up with people to find out where they're up to and also praying for Costa House and the ongoing impact of the Covid lockdown on residents and staff. Our playgroups have finished Term 2 and I'm suddenly wondering where has the year gone? We are now in July and it's turned into a busy month with our Planning Day next Saturday, a Mission Sunday next Sunday with Revd Noah from Seafarers, and worship with our Karen sisters and brothers to celebrate their year of being with us, in three weeks' time. And, in all this busyness, our readings today have also provided me with inspiration for our journey of faith.

As I reflected on where we were up to in this increasingly uncertain world, I was struck by the Old Testament reading about the healing of Naaman, the Aramean general. We all love a good healing story! Who doesn't? And if you go on and read the next five verses of this chapter, you'll find out that it's also

a conversion story. But I think, that what this particular scripture points to, is a deeper truth about God. You see, Naaman was an enemy of Israel. He was a Syrian, the hawkish region sitting above Israel, and, just like today, relations between the two countries were fraught. Just look at the King of Israel's reaction when Naaman visits with his request for healing. He thought it was a political ploy. But God is bigger than human politics, then and now. God works in unexpected places with unexpected people. God crosses borders. This text veers away from demonizing enemies to showing that God can work with them, with everyone.

It's a salient lesson isn't it? Perhaps some of our world leaders should read this scripture. And with this reflection I found a way to link today's Gospel reading with Jesus telling 70 disciples, who he is sending out in pairs, to bring greetings of peace. Peace, what a special commodity, and something that is often lacking at both the global and personal level. And it seems to me that if we don't have peace at a personal level, how can we have peace at a community level, a national level or even a global level?

In a way, this Gospel passage invites us to step out of the reactionism and hot headedness that the world around us reinforces. Jesus offers us instead, the consistent **promise of peace** and the **nearness of God's kingdom**. Jesus offers kinship with God and gives clear direction to his followers about how to respond, not react, as they engage with the world they live in, when offering these two clear proclamations.

The story of Jesus' sending out of the 70 gives a rare window into what it looked like to follow Jesus in this first generation. In verses 5-6 Jesus sends out disciples with the first proclamation that sounds deceptively simple: "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!'" (verse 5). This word of peace is the first word, the opening word, the announcing word. Notice that Jesus does not tell them to do any sort of assessment before

making this proclamation. He doesn't ask them to determine whether this house follows the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or whether this house has kept the law or whether this house is likely to receive the good news they bring. Jesus doesn't ask them to do a risk assessment or pre-judge whether this house will be worth their time. I wonder how many of us make assessments of people as to whether or not they will be receptive to a gospel message!

Jesus goes on to instruct them in the dynamics of sharing peace: "if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you" (verse 6). What does this mean? Well, Jesus assumes that these disciples he sends, do in fact have peace. Jesus says "Your peace" specifically, not just random, generic peace, your peace will rest on others or return to you. As we engage others, we must first be well-grounded in God's peace, the peace that passes understanding. God's shalom is more than being calm. It is confidence in God's abiding presence, within us, before us and around us, so that we also share that presence with others. Engaging others means not treating them as objects upon which we act, but as sacred others with whom we are called to be fully and peacefully present.

And, if they do not share this peace, Jesus does not advise reactivity, scorn or lecturing. Instead, he reassures his followers that their peace is not diminished and cannot be taken away from them: "it will return to you" (verse 6).

At the end of this section, Jesus instructs them in the second proclamation: "The kingdom of God has come near to you" (verse 9). Remarkably, this proclamation applies whether one is welcomed as in verse 8 or one is not welcomed as in verse 10. The kingdom of God is promised to all, to those who receive as well as to those who reject. This new kinship, a new way of

understanding all human relationships, God's ordering of all things, is a life-changing proclamation. And it is for everyone!

Here again, Jesus does not instruct them to argue, convince, or threaten if they are not welcomed, but he does advise them to signal their moving on by shaking dust off their shoes (verse 11). In this way, they are not weighed down by rejection, or paralyzed with trying to figure out what they did wrong or could have done differently to produce a different outcome. Instead, Jesus invites them to move forward in the confidence of these two proclamations, "Peace to this house!" and "The kingdom of God has come near."

As Christians, we can reliably base our lives on these two proclamations — "Peace to this house!" and "The kingdom of God has come near." This is the good news that we have to share! These keep our gaze on God's activity right in front of us, within us and around us, rather than turning it to blaming, accusing or judgmental analyzing, symptoms that the reactionism of today often holds our lives in bondage.

I invite you this week to experiment with these two proclamations by offering them daily. Perhaps you could think about how you would re-state each proclamation in a simple sentence using your own everyday speech. How might you put into your own words Jesus' proclamation "The kingdom of God has come near?" Perhaps it might be, "I can see God's love in your life right now" or "God is at work in all of this." What about "Peace to this house!" Perhaps this could become "Wishing you peace at this time."

I challenge you to intentionally make one proclamation in your own words once a day for a week. You could experiment with offering it to a family member, a co-worker, an anonymous driver or service person, or even to yourself. Why not allow time this week to invite God's presence into the lives of the people around you? You see, as we heard in our reading from the Old

Testament, God works in mysterious ways and we surely are part of the plan for creation and with Jesus by our side, we can make a difference.

I am hoping that you are all thinking of how we can, as a community, make a difference to Lara and Little River, sharing our peace and the news of the Kingdom. Next week, we have our Planning Day where we'll be talking about our next three years. Three and a half years ago, we gathered together for the first time to discern our future together, with each other and with God. Out of this day, we created our Vision of Welcoming, God Centred, Thriving, and then worked on building a three year Mission Action Plan. Next Saturday, we'll ask the question "How do we rate our progress in achieving our vision?" If you'd like to look at our Mission Action Plan, I've published it on our website in the About pages. I encourage you all to participate in our planning day next Saturday. It's a free event and to register either follow the QR code in the invitation in your pew sheet which I have also posted on the door into church, or follow the trybooking link. If you're not using computers or smart phones, just give the office a call.

So how do I summarize our readings today? God works in ways that are surprising and Jesus encourages us to make difference by spreading peace and letting people know about the kingdom of God. And don't you just love that the 70 disciples returned to Jesus with joy! Spreading the gospel of peace clearly had a positive impact on them. How will you personally make a difference this week, and how will we as a community make a difference in this community moving forward?

Let us pray.

God of Love and Surprises.

We pray that you will always be with us as we each make our journeys of life and faith. We pray that your wisdom will be poured into us and that we can respond in joy, worshipping you and spreading peace among our families, our friends and our communities. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.