

Sermon: 2019/07/07 (4th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C) - 2 Kings 5:1-14; Psalm 30; Galatians 6:1-16; Luke 10:1-11,16-20_BTR

My friends, says Saint Paul (of Tarsus) to the young Christians of mountainous Galatia in what-is-now central Turkey, 'May I *never* boast of anything' - '*...of anything*' (!) - 'except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...' [6:14]

The discovery, for that man, a former pharisee and persecutor of the Church - a person who had thought - spent most of his life thinking - that the idea that Jesus was, mysteriously, somehow, God-the-Creator-in-flesh was *ludicrous*(!); the discovery that he had been mistaken, that his scepticism was unjustified; that Jesus, a *widely* acknowledged miracle-worker had, in fact, proven Himself a divine savior - this *revelation* - this new knowledge, turned Paul's life upside down.

And he was thrilled that it had!

Everything about him changed - including his name.

And he never tired of "boasting" about this wonderful "news."

He traveled all over, throughout the countries around the eastern Mediterranean, and stood in very public spaces, speaking boldly and unembarrassedly about that amazing "discovery."

And he wrote many letters - most of the New Testament, in fact - which were to be read aloud in front of audiences, for many to hear.

Galatians, Ephesians, Romans and so on were "circulated" - that is to say, *shared* around, displayed and preserved for as many to learn from them as possible.

But perhaps that thought makes you nervous?

Imagine someone came along and said to you, "I want to take your most intimate, personal spiritual thoughts - your ideas about the meaning of life and the universe, and all of the biggest questions, really - and recite - repeat - those words to crowds of strangers."

How would that make you feel?

Would you be confident?

Would you be happy for this?

Would you "*boast*" about your faith in Jesus Christ as Paul was proud to say?

For many of us, I imagine that the answer is "No."

I imagine that many of us are a bit more timid about evangelism than the Apostle-to-the-Gentiles (as he is known).

And yet we're commanded to do it:

it was the last thing that Jesus had to say:

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations.” [Mt. 28:19]

And this was something that “The Twelve” had already begun to do.

They had had a “dry-run” at this; a trial:

Today, in *Luke*, Jesus sent them along with fifty-eight others - that’s right, I can do simple math! (see the first verse) - ‘in pairs[,] to every town...’ in the vicinity of where they were staying, to *invite* others to join the Church; to become like them: “followers;” *members*.

And it wasn’t easy.

Jesus wasn’t suffering any kind of delusion that this would be a “walk-in-the-park.”

Oh no!

“See,” He says, “I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.” [Lk. 10:3]

That’s our unbelieving, cynical, doubtful neighbors He’s referring to!

The nice lady next door?

With all the cats?

A wolf!

The lawn-obsessed chap across the street who lent you his leaf-blower?

A wolf!

The stressed-out cashier at the supermarket?

A wolf.

You get the idea.

And this is so true especially now:

More and more, ‘traditional’ belief in God is aberrant. [n.1]

Weird.

Freaky.

Rare.

So what, then, is our best strategy?

We need one!

St. Matthew’s is crying out for one - for growth; for faithfulness.

Well, here our Old testament reading from *2 Kings* is instructive:

So, as we learned last week, Elijah is gone and his protégé Elisha has taken his place as prophet to the sacred Kingdom of Israel, which is in *complete* disarray - a *total* mess:

divided and at war, literally, with itself.

And her enemies - those petty, little desert-states surrounding her on the north, east and south - see opportunity:

like hungry wolves circling wounded prey in the forest, they were “licking their lips.”

Why?

Because David, during *his* reign, one-hundred-and-fifty years earlier, had been a *great* warrior,

and he had expanded Israel's borders *well* into foreign territories. [n.2]

Those "territories" were now looking to reverse the situation.

And one of these enemies was Naaman, 'commander of the army of the king of Aram' [5:1] - which is Syria.

And we learn, from the text, that he had leprosy, *and* an Israeli servant-girl, who was his 'captive'. [v.2]

(Obviously, a victim of the violent chaos that was engulfing the region.)

Naaman either bought her at a slave-auction of POWs or captured her in one of his own raids.

They were endemic; perpetrated by both sides.

And yet, despite having a justified grudge against her owner, she risks telling him about her own beliefs - beliefs that might bring him healing: [see v.3].

Now, he would have certainly been praying to his own (fake) "gods" for this.

He would have been sacrificing to idols, appealing to carved, hollow totems for mercy; for their intercession.

But what he really needed was to hear the truth - that there is a single Creator, who loved him, and wanted a redeeming relationship with him.

And this "Good News" is dependent on messengers like us - like that 'young girl'. [v.2]

She was already in relationship with Naaman; in his household.

They saw each other regularly, presumably.

As she brought food or water or whatever to him.

And so, "reading between the lines," we see, she simply decided one day to "steer" the conversation away from usual "business" to the deeper, more important questions.

And she did that not to collect "a scalp," but because it was the compassionate thing to do:

Naaman's passive, uncaring pagan statues were never going to be able to give him what he needed.

What he needed was someone to tell him that.

To share the love of the knowledge of Jesus Christ with him.

And that's something we can do for the "Naamans" we know.

His slave-girl invited him to come and join her in the "Promised Land," and we can invite others to join us here; to meet God, and find innumerable blessing by doing so.

Let's take a moment to reflect.

Footnotes:

1. See, for example: Dreher, Rod (17th of January, 2019), 'Karen Pence as Condensed Symbol', *The American Conservative*, available at <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/karen-pence-condensed-symbol/> (accessed July 5, 2019).
2. Gabriel, Richard A. (2003), *The Military History of Ancient Israel*, Westport, C. T.: Praeger Publishers (Greenwood Publishing Group), 229f: 'David was to Israel what Sargon I was to Sumer, Ahmose I to Egypt, Philip II to Greece, and Augustus to Rome,... David expanded the Israelite state into a genuine imperial realm, which he bequeathed to his son [Solomon]. ...'