Little people, called to share God’s love with others, and to trust in God’s care

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Out of the mouths of…babes you’ve prepared praise for yourself? Mt 21.16b – Psalm 8:2 Out of the mouths of babes these days describes the sort of innocent, but sometimes astounding comments young people make. A couple invited some people to dinner. At the table, Mum turned to their six-year-old daughter and said, ‘Would you like to say grace for us?’ The girl replied, ‘I wouldn’t know what to say.’ Mum said, ‘Just say what you’ve heard me say.’ ‘Okay,’ said the daughter, and bowed her head. ‘Lord, why on earth did we invite all these people to dinner?’

It’s an ancient phenomenon too. In today’s Bible stories, little people who tell an unexpected truth shake things up in a big way; little unnamed messengers.

In the first reading, there’s the wisdom of the captured Israelite slave girl who served Naaman’s wife, and then Naaman’s servants who tell him to swallow his pride and take the simple advice he’s been offered. In the Gospel, it’s seventy other disciples (not the twelve) who Jesus sends out to prepare the way for his final mission through Samaria and on to Jerusalem. Little people sent with a message to tell other little people – no money, no luggage, no sandals – just a simple greeting of peace, a message to tell, and simple trust that their basic needs will be met. Little people, called to share God’s love with others, and to trust in God’s care. Little people, called to share God’s love with others, and to trust in God’s care.

Those little messengers ask people to do the simplest things – the slave girl telling Naaman to go and see Elisha; Naaman's servants – 'go and wash in the Jordan' – and he is healed. Jesus' unnamed 70; told to go out, heedless of comfort or safety, and simply trust in God's care and get people ready to meet Jesus. Little people telling the truth; trusting God and living it out. And we number among their harvest.

It's such a contrast to the way the world of power and influence works. Naaman's King, ignoring advice, didn't send Naaman to visit the prophet in Samaria. He took over and sent him 'straight to the top'; go and confront the unsuspecting King of Israel with an unheard-of demand for healing.

Naaman's king couldn't hear the message of the Israelite servant girl; she was just a nobody. He only heard as much as he did because her message came to him through his general – an important man. He ignored the girl's simple advice and did things his way. What would a prophet who lives in Samaria know? Kings are the ones who get things done in this world. So, loading Naaman with a caravan of treasure and a wild demand, he almost provoked a war rather than a healing.

God works through little people. And today we see how God shows that respect to little people by trusting nobodies with the most wonderful responsibilities. Today's stories show us little people doing small things that change the world. Yet even the 20/20 hindsight our stories give us don't necessarily change the way we see things.

That certainly goes for me. When I'm confronted with a challenge, my instinct is often to go to the top; find an expert in the field. But so often, simply listening to God, or remarkably, listening to a child, will solve the challenge in the simplest way. If only the Aramean king had believed that girl's message in the first place.

So when a person of simple, straightforward faith speaks, we

should listen too. And if you have a simple straightforward faith, and you sense God prompting you to speak, you should speak. And if God has spoken to us through you – called us, prompted us, we should act on that prompting.

I was involved in a job review for someone who didn't have enough self-trust – who was focussed far too much on what might go wrong, and on not making mistakes. It was a difficult review. Here was someone genuinely called to a job where they could make a real difference, but paralysed because of futile worry. I understand the impulse – I'm trying to serve God: do what God sends me to do, and I want to do the very best for God. I don't want to get it wrong. So much rides on it. The danger is that I get paralysed with worry and get nothing done. But we can't be like that. Jesus calls us – and if we look at the story today, he sends people out with the most basic preparation and resources imaginable, humanly speaking. We are to trust; trust him, and trust his assessment that we're ready to do the job, and trust that God will be with us to see it through.

Has Jesus ever sent you and you've never gone? Don't worry. It's not too late. Trust that you have everything you need for his mission. Go ahead and do it.

Now, let's solve the quiz from my weekly about Naaman's two donkey loads of soil. As we read on beyond the official lesson, we see Naaman transformed. He tries to offer Elisha thank-you gifts. Elijah declines. But then Naaman asks for something very strange; two mule-loads of earth to take home with him. The quiz questions were a/ why does Naaman want to take this soil home with him? and b/ what do you think he'll do with it?

Why? 17 your servant will no longer offer burnt-offering or sacrifice to any god except the Lord…" How does soil from Elisha's land ensure that? Like most people of his time, Naaman believed gods were local to their lands. That's still

the case for people today who see local lands inhabited by local spirits.

So if Naaman wanted to worship Israel's God, he needed some Israelite earth to do it on. This also explains the lovely bit where Naaman tells Elisha that as a general, he'd need to appear as if he were worshipping the Aramean god, Rimmon, in solidarity with his king. But he really wouldn't mean it; would that be okay?

I imagine that Naaman secreted some of that soil wherever he had to be as he bowed beside his king appearing as if he were joining in the king's worship of Rimmon. But in Naaman's mind, standing on that soil, his worship could only be offered to the God to whom that soil belonged. Elisha, knowing what he must have been thinking, and also knowing better, nevertheless tells Naaman that'll fine. Your new God is broad-minded Naaman: 'Go in peace'.

We can go on mission for a God like that: and we'll be fine too. Amen