

Read 2 Kings 5:1-10.

I'm not sure how many of you have had the unique privilege of watching the older Veggie Tales movies, but there's a song from one of those movies that I haven't been able to get out of my head since reading this story in 2 Kings.

If you're not familiar with Veggie Tales, they're a series of short movies that depict different Bible Stories, but they're told by vegetables. Larry the Cucumber. Bob the Tomato. Junior the asparagus. The French peas.

And the episode I'm thinking of is when the little shepherd boy, David—who we looked at last week, although here is portrayed by Junior the asparagus—has heard that the armies of Israel are being intimidated by a large pickle named Goliath, who is part of the Philistine Army.

And so David the little asparagus goes to Saul to say that he will go before this fiend who is offending the name of the LORD.

Now Saul, played by a larger asparagus, is of course a bit worried about small little David going up against Goliath, and so he offers his military armor and sword to David. But after trying on the armour and realizing it is far too big for him, David has to explain—through a song of course—that God will be with him. As the song goes:

He's big, but God's bigger.
And when I think of Him, that's when I figure,
With His help little guys can do big things too.

With His help, little guys can do big things too. It does seem to be a theme in Scripture that the Lord uses seemingly small and insignificant people—people who wouldn't be deemed 'much' in the culture, people who didn't serve much purpose or have much importance. They are the ones who God wants to use.

Like, for instance, the young servant girl in our story this morning.

Last week I mentioned, when we looked at the story of David and Saul in the cave, that the Israelites were in a season in their relationship with God where they had rejected the Lord as their king and were instead wanting to look like all the other nations around them.

Well, by the time we get to this story in 2 Kings, the context of Israel is a hot mess. Because their temptation to be like the other nations has now become their reality. They've adopted and are worshipping other gods. They have a long lineage of kings who have not followed in the Lord's ways. They've been split in two and now have *two* kings overseeing upper Israel and Judah.

And, as God had warned them, the nations—who Israel wanted to be like—have been raiding and plundering Israel on a regular basis.

At this point in Israel's history—this divided nation that was meant to be under the Kingship of God and a light to the nations around them, representing and witnessing to *this God*—they are now *no different* than the surrounding people groups.

Very few have remained faithful to Yahweh, and so rather than having a whole group unified for a common purpose, which was the idea, there are fragments of faithfulness spread through Israel—and now it seems even into the surrounding nations.

Rather than being a lighthouse in the middle of the ancient world, the faithful are now like scattered tea lights spread all around.

At this stage in its history, Israel is on the verge of shifting to being a *scattered* people, sent into exile. And a young servant girl is showing them what faithfulness in that context needs to look like.

Who is this little girl, who isn't even given a name? Well, she is actually rather insignificant—at least in the eyes of her culture. She's part of the bounty that was gathered in a raid.

At some point, Naaman, the commander of the army of the king of Aram, had sent out a band of raiders into the territory of Israel to attack and plunder a clan or small town. And out of that raid, his men had taken captive for him—really, for his wife—a young Israelite girl.

So we can probably assume that this girl has been utterly traumatized. It's not certain that her family was killed, but it's likely. She's lost everything. She's lost her home, her family, her community. We don't know when or at what age she was taken, but either way, there's no reason why this young girl should care one bit about this man who has ruined her life and made her a slave.

Now, Naaman—alternatively—is an incredibly significant person. The text says that “*He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded.*”

And according to the text, the LORD had *allowed* Naaman to have influence and victory over Israel. So as readers, we're led to think, then, that whatever follows is something that the Lord has orchestrated.

In other words, it may be that this little, insignificant girl was intentionally saved from the raid and purposefully planted in the home of Naaman.

Why? Because Naaman has leprosy.

Now, we don't know when he developed the disease, or how severe it was, but it's likely that he's been suffering from it for a few years. Perhaps the young servant girl has never even seen her master without it.

And again, you would think, considering what's happened to her, that she would have zero interest in seeing him healed. Considering what *his* men have done, and the fact that she is a slave in a foreign home, you would think that there would be no part of this girl's brain that would seek the welfare of her master.

But amazingly, this young servant girl is the first one in Scripture to do what the LORD will eventually ask all of His faithful remnant to do when, because of their refusal to return to Him, He extracts them from the land and sends them out into exile.

What does He ask them to do? Look at what is written in the book of Jeremiah in the famous letter to the exiles:

⁴ This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶ Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.

In other words, *this is your new home*. This is your new context. The situation that I want you to be in. Because you were not faithful to me in your former context. That context—where you were given land that was not yours and protection and safety—that didn't work out so well. Your temptation to be like everyone else—to want more of what others could offer you—was too strong.

And so now the Israelites must enter a new chapter where they will actually be forced to find God in the muck and mess of the other nations. Where they will no longer have a false sense of control or illusions of power. Where they will have *no one else to depend on* but Him.

Which, turns out, was a context in which they were *more* faithful than they were previously. It still wasn't ideal of course—something more was still needed, as we know. But at least it was moving in the right direction.

Because it seems that there is something about being a minority—about feeling the pressure, standing out, experiencing a level of powerlessness—that brings out a more devoted and purer kind of faithfulness.

And because that is the case, when this is your new context, says the LORD in Jeremiah, then I also want you to (v. 7):

⁷ “...seek the peace and prosperity (or welfare) of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

This is what this little servant girl is doing. In a moment of sheer compassion and bravery, she says to Naaman’s wife, *“If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria. He would cure him of his leprosy.”*

Such a simple thing to say, but think about the audacity of that statement. Naaman has probably tried everything—he’s got the money and resources to do so. He’s made sacrifices to all his gods. Seen all the healers. And this insignificant little slave girl has the audacity to tell him what to do.

If you’ve ever experienced that, you know how annoying it is when you’ve tried literally everything and someone—in complete ignorance—says to you, “Have you tried this?”

Say you’ve been struggling with sleep for months—maybe years—and someone says to you, “Have you tried, like, going to bed earlier?”

Now, you’d probably have a bit more grace if it was coming from an 8-year-old. But again, this young servant girl had no status, no wisdom, no experience, no professionalism, no medical insights about his condition. She knew nothing.

But she knew something. She knew the LORD.

She was aware of and has been captivated by the work of God through this prophet in Israel—whose name she doesn’t even seem to remember—but she knows that he can do something for her master. She sees her master in pain; leprosy is of course a terrible disease. And she has compassion for him.

It’s just that simple. He’s in pain. She has compassion. And *she* points *him* in the right direction. Apparently, little guys, or girls, can in fact do big things too. Doesn’t matter who has the greater authority, the higher status, the more wisdom, knowledge, and life experience, the more accreditation and regard.

What matters is who you know. At least, that’s how this young servant girl was looking at it.

She seeks the peace and prosperity of the small yet significant context in which she’s been planted. She has an impact within her relatively small area of influence. She knows that she has something to offer. She knows something that her mighty master does not.

And it makes me wonder, do we recognize that we know something that others do not?

If you've been in the Canadian context over the last decade or so, you'll know that—not so different from Israel—Canada has also gone through its own deconstruction phase.

Now, it's arguable whether Canada could ever truly be classified as a 'Christian nation,' but it was certainly the case in previous generations that Canada boasted more Christians and more churches than it does now.

Take the province of Quebec, for instance. Just in the last fifty years, Quebec—which once had a large Catholic contingent—has gone through a dramatic decline and is now a highly secular province.

Look at these statistics. In the 70's, approximately 65% of people went to weekly mass, and now that number is down to 2%. Almost no one in the 70's would have said that they were 'irreligious,' but now over 30% say that they have no religious affiliation whatsoever.

Author Darrel Guder writes in his book, "Missional Church," speaks about how 50 years ago, everyone in Vancouver and the greater Vancouver area would have known—or at least been familiar—with the song, *Amazing Grace*. It was the most common song played at funerals.

But now, much of the population—especially the younger generations—does not know this song.

Our landscape has changed *dramatically*. And it's probably more accurate these days to say that rather than being Christians among Christians, we are Christians in exile. We're scattered. We're fragmented tea lights in a sea of non-religious secularites.

Many no longer feel a need for God in their day-to-day living. And that plays out in our societal norms. It's highly rare and even offensive to walk into a store and hear worship music. People don't want 'Merry Christmas' written on their cards and storefronts—it has to say 'Happy Holidays.'

I could go on and on about how our society has changed, but I think the more important conversation is the one that this Scripture text begs of us.

Like Naaman's servant girl, will we seek the peace and welfare of the people around us? As a people in exile, will we boldly speak of the healing power of our God?

Again, are we even aware that we know something that others do not?

Because look at what happens after Naaman gets encouragement from his servant girl—from the least likely person, a nobody, an insignificant. He takes that piece of knowledge to the King of Aram. And he doesn't try to fluff up the story to make it sound more impressive.

V. 4 – “Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said.” Think of the humility it would have taken for Naaman to go before the King—his boss, his master—and tell him that his last hope for healing has come to him through a young, foreign, servant girl.

And yet, the King of Aram doesn’t laugh at him or call him a fool. Seemingly in full trust, he says to Naaman, “Yes, go!” And he sends a letter to the King of Israel, asking him to cure Naaman’s leprosy, probably assuming that the King of Israel will know what he means.

Ironically, it’s the King of *Israel* who lacks the faith. It’s the King of *Israel*, the leader of *Israel*, the leader of *God’s people*—the one who should know better and should know to immediately consult with the Lord’s prophet—he tears his clothes and assumes that the responsibility is his.

V. 7: “*Am I God?*” he says. “*Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy?*”

Ironically, it’s the king who should know the LORD best who actually knows Him the least. And so thankfully Elisha steps in and resolves the dilemma. But the juxtaposition of these two kings points to an important reality that I think we would do well to recognize.

When the King of Aram seeks out healing for his commander from the King of Israel—who has access to and knowledge of the one true God—rather than immediately consulting with the prophet and pointing Naaman in the right direction, the King of Israel thinks it’s all about him.

Now, to be fair, the King of Israel is under a lot of pressure these days. His nation is shrinking, his people are getting carried off, he’s in a fragile position of leadership. But he caves into the pressure and forgets what his main job is.

What was his main job? The exact same job that the young servant girl had and had been anointed for. The same job that the people of Israel had when they were sent into exile.

The same job that we have today. To seek the peace and prosperity of the people and place in which God has planted us. And to point them in the right direction.

To say to our neighbours, our colleagues, our friends, our baristas—either with words or through our love—“*Here* is where you can find healing. *Here* is where you can find refreshment, and peace, and consolation, and compassion.”

“*Here* is where your Saviour is.” He is the peace and welfare that you are seeking in your life. He who died and rose again so that you may *have* life.

I'll ask it again: are we aware that we know something—that we know *Someone*—who others do not? Because we too have been called to live as God's people in exile, to demonstrate a purer kind of faithfulness in this new cultural climate, to recognize that we have a gift to offer,

To follow in the footsteps of a young servant girl and boldly point to the true place of healing.

Yes, there is a very strong and still growing Canadian value to keep your religious views to yourself. Yes, there are many workplaces now in which you cannot express your faith or speak about it. Yes, there is a bad taste in the mouths of many Canadians when the word 'church' is even mentioned.

But, as this story in 2 Kings reveals to us, even our smallest efforts can do big things. Even though we feel like we are 'nothing' in the eyes of the culture and have become the 'fools'—as Paul put it.

We have no idea how our comments about faith or singing Amazing Grace will land any more than Naaman's servant girl would have.

But she has a Beatitude legacy—one that demonstrates poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, mercy, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, purity of heart, peacemaking, enduring persecution because of that righteousness—because all of these Kingdom-come-near characteristics *inspire* that kind of boldness. It inspires a kind of audacious 'throwing it out there' and seeing what sticks.

When the Kingdom of Jesus breaks through us, it's this kind of boldness that comes out. And it's the tool that we need to be bright shining tea lights in a sea of despair that is looking for hope.

It is not we who make the impact, but the Kingdom of Christ *through* us. We simply point others in the right direction and seek their peace and welfare because we know that only in Jesus Christ can their peace truly be sought.

We can offer the little courage that we have, speak of the One we know, and recognize that God often chooses the lowly and the humble to do His greatest work.

Because with His help, little guys can do big things too.