

Sunday Evening 24th November 2013, Kenneth Gray. 2Kings 6:8-23 “Healing and saving”

As Naaman returned to Aram he must have felt quite positively towards Israel but shortly afterwards the Arameans were at war with the Israelites. This conflict was like guerrilla warfare with raiding parties being mobilised to overcome the Israelites. But the success of such tactics relies on excellent intelligence about the enemy's positions and resources and the king of Aram's sorties were proving ineffective. He was frustrated that the Israelites seemed able to anticipate his every move and evade attack and he grew increasingly angry and suspicious that there was a spy in his own camp passing information to the enemy.

In recent weeks we in Freeland have felt 'under attack' as vandals have destroyed banner boards in our car park. If only we knew when they were going to 'attack' we could be there to stop them. These incidents, though disappointing and frustrating, are as nothing compared to the serious, life-threatening attacks being experienced for example in Nigeria where Christians are being murdered in their homes by random Muslim raiding parties.

The King of Aram's officers tell him that there is no spy but that the Israelites' prophet, Elisha, is the one who is thwarting the King's plans. Ironically Elisha seems to enjoy more respect from the Arameans than he does from his own people! The king therefore commands his officers to capture Elisha thereby missing the point that Elisha is favoured by God and is His instrument. He fails to grasp that Elisha will also know the king's intention to capture him at Dothan.

Elisha's servant sees the enemy soldiers surrounding the city and is afraid. But 'Don't be afraid,' the prophet answered. 'Those who are with us are more than those who are with them'. Miraculously, the eyes of the servant now perceive overwhelming numbers of Israelites. There's a lesson in that for us. We sometimes feel outnumbered or feel on our own in certain situations because we view them through human eyes. We must never forget we are surrounded and sustained by the presence of God. People often have spoken of experiencing that presence when they have been in hard situations, perhaps in bereavement or awaiting an operation. It is not for us to solve every problem that arises - we can lay our concerns and burdens before the Lord and let him deal with them. Kenneth commented that this has often been his experience in difficult situations during his ministry where he has had no idea how to proceed. He has sought God's help and has found that the Lord has gone before him and solved the problem or smoothed the path for him.

It is not always easy to surrender ourselves in this way. It is all too human to fret and feel threatened or worried when difficult problems arise. Unless we place our confidence in the Lord our faith is misplaced and any sense of 'security' we might have is meaningless. As World War 2 got under way in 1940, people in Britain had to adjust to the fear of bombing, and find the will to resist German invasion. King George VI called for a national day of prayer and this was organised by the government. We have forgotten this form of response to national crises.

Now, by another miracle, Aram's troops are temporarily blinded and are led into Samaria by Elisha. The Israelite king is excited and desperate to kill them all but he follows Elisha's instructions and instead gives them a feast and returns them to their master. This proves to be an adept move in international relations as the war ends and there are no more Aramean incursions. The king of Israel's compassion and bounty have warded off the evil. As a result the Israelites feel reaffirmed as God's people and have strengthened their confidence in the Lord.

How often ministry through providing meals breaks down enmity and bitterness among people. That is what Christians should be doing - discouraging conflicts and bringing people together - not relying on our human skills but calling on the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

When the Arameans return to Aram they feel differently about Israel and have a different understanding of the Israelites. We often demonise our enemies. Kenneth observed that during the Cold War we were encouraged to view all things Russian as 'bad' and see the West as 'good'. God in his providence has turned enemies into allies. When the Arameans discover that their beliefs about the Israelites are not true they cease hostilities.

Christians should be aiming to show that enemies can become friends. Today, in some parts of Israel, Aram is still launching attacks. We should be praying that those enemies become friends. Calvin exhorted the Church to pray unceasingly for the restoration of Jerusalem. This has been achieved and, following Elisha's example, we as Christians should call on the Lord in prayer that everyone in the Middle East, Jews and Arabs, all come to faith in Jesus Christ, God incarnate.