

Have You *Lived* The Story?
Gates Presbyterian Church
Sunday, July 8, In the Year of Our LORD, 2007
The Rev. Ralph S. English

2 Kings 5:1-14 and Luke 10:1-11, 16-17

Hymn – “I Love to Tell the Story”

Fourth stanza:

I love to live the story, for I am called to be,
A servant to God's people, that others might believe,
I love to live the story, because I know I might,
Bring those who are disheartened, the glory of God's light.
I love to tell the story, 'twill be my claim in glory:
I loved and lived the story, Of Jesus and His Love.

She was just a little girl, snatched from her home in a raid by the Syrians from the north, made to serve a great lady whose husband was commander of all of Syria's armed forces. How sad a life! She was taken away from family, her homeland, all that she knew and loved. How easy it would have been for her to succumb to the routine of caring for another lady, to live in comparative comfort, perhaps even to forget from whence she came. But she “kept the faith.” She knew and loved, held dear, the faith of her mother and father – she knew the stories of great persons of faith who lived in Samaria and Judea. And she did more than just know the story – she told the story – for when it was apparent that her mistress' husband suffered from leprosy, that dreaded disease that eats away at the body, she, this little, unnamed servant girl, told of a great prophet in Samaria who could heal him. She knew the story. She loved the story. She told the story. She lived the story – which is to bring others into the blessed rest and security of God's healing and love.

The Books of the Kings are, of course, about *Kings*. In this reading from the 5th Chapter of Second Kings, we do read about kings – about the King of Syria whose commanding officer had leprosy. We read about the King of Samaria whose land was controlled by the greater nation, Syria, to the north. We read of how that King of Samaria was not at all pleased to hear that this Naaman, this commanding officer, was being sent to him that he, the officer, might be healed of leprosy. Like so many political officials who lived lives of intrigue and dealings that would make Machiavelli proud, Jehoram, the King of Samaria, thought that this was a ploy – that his failure to find a cure for Naaman would result in even further humiliation. It didn't occur to him that the request for healing was genuine. Then we have Naaman, this great and powerful general of Syria's armies – and when he is sent to the home of Elisha the prophet, gets in a snit because Elisha sends a servant out to tell Naaman to go and wash in the Jordan River seven times. Naaman shows his true, all too human, emotions. First, he is angry that Elisha himself does not appear. Then he is angry because would it not have been easier for him to wash himself in one of the great rivers of Syria instead of this often muddy, very shallow, passage of water, the Jordan, that Elisha had the audacity to call a river. Often, it was no more than a stream!

But again, and we will pounce on how this is a common theme, Naaman's *servants* come to the rescue. They have the chutzpah to tell their commander that he should do as the prophet, Elisha, requests.

All of these servants lived more than one thousand years before Jesus would tell his followers that they would go out and be like lambs among wolves, servants of God in the midst of those who did not want – or care – to hear God's wonderful news of salvation. And are not the servants in this reading from 2 Kings the heroes? The little girl who told her mistress to tell her husband of a great prophet in another land, Naaman's servants who spoke up and told their commander that he should follow Elisha's order to wash in the Jordan, and Elisha, servant of the living God who knew that *he did not need to go out* and stand before Naaman and that it was not Elisha's doing that healed Naaman, but the work of God – these servants of the one God are the ones who knew the story, loved the story, told the story and lived the story.

One thousand years later, Jesus would instruct seventy "others," – that is all we are told about them – how anonymous, how *ordinary* – just *others* whose names would never be recorded in any human tome, whose deeds would be forgotten by humans – but whose ministry and mission would be blessed by the Almighty God who knew they knew the story, loved the story, told the story and lived the story.

And those four triads of words – know the story, love the story, tell the story and live the story – how those go around and around! To *know* and *love* the story is to want, at deepest reaches of one's heart to *tell* the story – and it is in telling that we *live* out Christ's command to go out into the world and share the good news. Then, in living the story, do we not then know it even better, love its implication for our lives and the lives of others, and then want to tell it even more?

And there are those who need to hear that good news – not just those who suffer with disease – as Naaman did with leprosy – but those who suffer of mind and spirit. As Naaman was cured of leprosy, the disease of his body, by dipping his body into the Jordan River, how might all of us, we and those we invite to hear and live and know the Good News, how might we, in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, be cured of the sins of our souls!

Jesus sent those seventy out in thirty-five pairs. Just think how people who call themselves Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons follow that command in the literal sense! We of the Reformed Tradition do not agree with many of those two groups' theological leanings – but we certainly must respect their devotion to the cause, their literal interpretation that to know and love the story means more than just keeping it in one's own heart and breast – that it means telling the story and living out the commands of our LORD.

Today's sports news tells the story of Jeremy Guthrie, a rookie pitcher for the Baltimore Orioles, who at the age of 28 is enjoying success in the major leagues. It isn't lost on the sports world that he "lost" two years of baseball and pitching because as a Mormon he spent two years on a mission. Granted, the word "lost" is my word, because I want to play on that word by reminding all of us that in those two years, Mr. Guthrie was anything but "lost" for he was sharing and living all that was so important to him – and hoping that in sharing and living the Good News, others would turn away from all that possesses us – all to which we might succumb that gets us lost in the turmoil and strains of the world.

The challenge today is as simple – and yet as profound – as it comes. If you know and love the story of Jesus and His love – then you, as servants of the living God, will want to tell that story to others – and live in such a way that others will glorify our God for all that our Creating, Redeeming and Empowering God does for each of us!

Amen.