

St. Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor.

Sixth Sunday of Pentecost — Sunday 8th July 2007

Rev'd Rob Lamerton

2 Kings 5.1-14, Psalm 30, Galatians 6.1-16, Luke 1-1-20

In the Old Testament readings over the last few weeks we have been hearing about the prophets Elijah and Elisha. With the appearance of Elisha in today's reading, I thought I should give you a little bit of information about them.

It was about 100 years after the time of David and Solomon and the original kingdom had divided into the Northern and the Southern parts.

Elijah was called Elijah the Tishbite because he came from the Tishbe area of Gilead about 30 kilometres south of the Sea of Galilee and very close to where Elisha came from at Abel Meholah in the Northern Jordan valley. In present day terms it appears to be in Jordan across from the Palestinian West Bank and it would have been in the Northern part of the divided kingdom.

Elijah lived in the ninth century BC i.e. from around 890 to about 840? (My guess!)

Elijah's faith and zeal made him a leader in opposing the encroaching worship of Baal which was being promoted by Ahab (king in Jerusalem roughly from 874 to 850 BC. Ahab's wife Jezebel persecuted Elijah.

Elijah's fame grew until he was seen as the forerunner of the Day of the Lord, the beginning of the new age! He is remembered for:

- miracles and the miraculous elements of his ministry,
- his struggle against the worship of Baal,
- his denunciation of various kings; and
- as a forerunner of the end of the age.

Elisha was called by Elijah when Elijah threw his cloak over him as he was ploughing!

Elisha was thought to have been a peasant from Abel Meholah very close to Elijah's home. The fact that he was ploughing with 12 yoke of oxen (that's 24 animals) which he then killed to say farewell to his village suggests that he may have not been so poor. He then saw Elijah taken up. He struck the Jordan and it parted for him to cross. He was seen by a band of prophets of Jericho who then hailed him as their leader.

Elisha's ministry began in the last years of the reign of Ahab or early in the reign of his successor Joram who ruled in Jerusalem from 849-842BC. Elisha continued his ministry until around 800 BC in the reign of king Joash.

His ministry and activity is shrouded in legend.

Elisha:

- is reported to have performed miracles—one we see in the story today;
- was a player in political events and was involved in the revolution of Hazael of Syria and in the uprising of Jehu of Israel;
- maintained good relationships with the royal household after Jehu and was esteemed by Joash (Elijah was often at odds with the authorities but Elisha was respected.);

- had influence. He saw his role as guiding the nation in the ways of God.

Many people see parallels between Elisha and Jesus! Both

- had an itinerant ministry
- had disciples;
- challenged political powers;
- performed miracles; and
- had a forerunner (Elijah for Elisha and John the Baptist for Jesus).

In our Old Testament story today, Naaman the Syrian, seeking a cure of his leprosy, is sent by the king of Aram to the king of Israel looking for the “prophet of Samaria”. After almost causing a diplomatic incident, the king of Israel is encouraged to send Naaman to Elisha.

So Naaman arrives with horses and chariots at Elisha’s house, but leaves angrily when told to wash in the Jordan River seven times. It seems he wants a grand occasion and believes Elisha should have made a much bigger effort.

Eventually persuaded by his servants Naaman accepts Elisha’s approach and is cleansed! How often does the answer lie in simplicity and humility rather than the great occasion?

KIS: Keep it Simple (or KISS: Keep it Simple Stupid)

The way God works is often in the bafflingly simple and humble!

Paul points out that in his day some of the Christian believers wanted “to make a good showing in the flesh.” In human terms they wanted things to “look good” to “put on a good show” by compelling new believers to follow the old ways, obey the Law and accept circumcision! Like Naaman, they wanted it to look right!

But Paul reminds them that it is in the cross of Christ that the mystery of God's life is revealed. Verse 14: “May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

In the gospel, Jesus does not appoint people to create great religious events but to meet people at ground level! He appoints seventy (in some manuscripts seventy-two), following the pattern of Moses and representing the nations of the world. There is no limit to this message!

He encourages them to travel light for mobility!

Whatever house you enter:

- bring God's peace!
- share and accept what is given!
- sink into the culture!
- mix with the people in the every day!
- don't be afraid to move on if necessary but let them know that “the kingdom of God has come near” (Pray?)

The seventy do as Jesus asks and return. The fall of Satan from heaven indicates the defeat of the evil one in and through the efforts of the seventy. For Jesus it is a great victory. But, do not rejoice at this! Do not rejoice

that you have great power or that the spirits are defeated! Instead rejoice that your names are written in heaven!

Don't rejoice at the great and amazing but simply in the knowledge of your place with God! This is surely where we begin!