

## **Bearing Burdens: Ordinary People doing Extraordinary Things**

(2Kings 5:1-14 & Galatians 6:1-16 – Preached at Footscray Baptist on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022)

Do you remember the film 'The Mission'? A former slave trader is challenged by a Jesuit Priest, to serve his penance for killing his brother. by serving the people he traded in rather than rotting in jail. He is challenged to choose his own penance. So, on the journey to the people in South America he carries with him a large netted sack full of swords, armour and weapons (symbols of his former life). As he climbs the mountain it is clear this burden is too much and hampering him from doing his penance. As he sees how this is weighing him down, another young priest hacks off the sack and it falls down the mountain. He then is able to continue the journey, but you will have to watch the film to see how it ends.

We all carry burdens. Secrets, resentment, grief, chronic illness, keeping the peace, paying the bills, caring for children or elderly parents or others, keeping a roof over our heads, too many possessions or too few, money, pride, just doing daily living tasks.

Burdens, loads to carry. When I think about this the image other than the one from the film I mentioned earlier, is that of oxes or donkeys or camels carrying heavy loads.

The people in our story from the Hebrew bible today carry burdens, some are their own, others they carry on behalf of others.

Naaman carries some burdens – wealth, power, possessions and pride, but more significantly a highly contagious disease which would eventually put all of that at risk.

No doubt his wife and other staff were sharing that burden and trying to find ways to ease it.

Then we have an unnamed slave girl, no doubt carrying her own burdens – stolen from her family and country as the price of war. Daily carrying burdens to keep the household running – cooking, cleaning, running errands. What's more she is becoming worried about the lady of the household and her worries about Naaman.

Let's revisit the story for a bit

Naaman is a powerful leader of the army in Syria which has successfully beaten Israel at war. He has much wealth and many possessions as a result. Then he contracts a highly contagious disease, something that his power, money and privilege cannot cure. Then, one of his unnamed slaves makes a suggestion, about where he might get help. She suggests that help might be available in the country he had defeated. Willing to give it a go, he gets a letter of recommendation from his King and rocks up to the King of Israel with all his men and gifts. The King of Israel thinks this is an ambush as the memory of the defeat is still very real in his mind. What to do? Suddenly a religious man called Elisha offers to help, so they send Naaman there. Upon arrival at Elisha's, he gets ready to be greeted and hand over his gifts, but Elisha doesn't even come out

to meet him, he sends a servant to tell him to go and dip in the Jordan river seven times. Incensed, the man won't even come and meet him and then wants him to wash in the dirty muddy river, he throws a tantrum. Seems his pride is greater than his desire for a cure. Keen to help, his servants talk some sense into him, and remind him that he would do anything to be cured, so why not go and wash in the river. So he does, and is cured and becomes a believer in the God of Israel.

His burden is lifted by others sharing it – a nameless slave girl, his courageous servants and a foreign prophet. He does however have to let go of some of the other baggage he carries (much like our priest in 'The Mission') – pride, power and big expectations. He has to learn to listen to the little people, the ordinary people who end up making an enormous difference to his life. Ordinary people with no great claims to fame, are the voice of God for Naaman, all who are willing to share his burden, to bear his burden.

Paul urges the faithful at Galatia to forgo pride and self-sufficiency and to bear one another's burdens and to take every opportunity to work for the good of all. This is precisely what all the servants do for Naaman.

When I was a teenager, I belonged to a group called Girls Friendly Society, an Anglican version of Girl Guides and our motto was: bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.

Bearing or sharing another's burdens is something we can all do. In fact, I think it is at the heart of relationship with each other. When we share each other's load, it makes it possible to deal with whatever life throws at us.

It is in essence what we do when disasters strike – floods, fires, earthquakes, famine and so on. We all dig deep and give money or food or clothing or offer shelter or time.

It is in essence what we do when we cook a meal for new mum or when someone is sick.

It is in essence what we do when we volunteer at CFA, SES, Lifesavers, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, the local school, an aged care centre, Clean Up Australia or Orange Sky.

It doesn't need to be a big deal, we can all do it, it might be as simple as

- A pot of soup
- A small donation to a charity
- A bag of rice for the Houses of Hope
- A bunch of flowers to someone who is unwell
- A listening ear
- A ride home

Little things can make a big difference. God's grace often comes from surprising places, from people on the margins of society, Sometimes, we have to be willing to let go of our pride and self-sufficiency and let another share our burden.

Our smallness and seeming insignificance should not stop us from sharing another's burden, that is what the unnamed slave girl teaches us. Sharing the burden of another may well change the world, or at least the world for the person we are helping.

Let us bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ. Amen.