

Sermon Preached By Phillip Jensen, Dean of Sydney, at The Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney, on Wednesday 18th January 2006
Reading: 2 Kings 5:1-8
Topic: "*The Unsung Heroine of Faith*"

A few years' ago my wife and I toured the French and Belgian battlefields of World War 1. The most moving places were the cemeteries with the graves of thousands of young men and women. What surprised and shocked me was the inscription, "Known only to God", "Australian Soldier", "Australian Signalman", "New Zealand Corporal" then, "Known only to God".

KNOWN ONLY TO GOD.

These people died for us but we do not know who they were, which body, or body part, was whose so they were buried, "Known Only to God".

In our reading there is another victim of war whose name is not recorded, whose life and death are unknown, except to God. It was the slave girl of the Syrian General, Naaman. She was an Israelite, carried off as a trophy and captive of war, made into a slave of the general's wife. We only hear about her in two verses of the Bible. We don't know about her future life, whether she escaped, was freed, returned, rewarded, whether she married and mothered. It is all known only to God. What we do know is that she was a heroine of faith.

Her master, Naaman, was

THE GREAT MAN WHO HAD TWO MASTERS.

His first master he knew well, he was the king of Syria. Naaman was a great man with his master, held in high favour by the king because of the military victories he delivered to the king. He was the kind of general every king wants. He was a brave man, a man of valour, a great man but, unbeknown to Naaman (and to the king of Syria) the general had another master, a second master, in verse 1, "*because the Lord had given victory to Syria.*"

The reason for Syrian victory was not General Naaman's skill, ability and valour but the Lord's determining. Even in victory over Israel, God's people, the Lord is the ruler of all, he gives victory to his enemies and to his friends, because the Lord is the lord.

Strange is the working of God. Our unsung heroine was, by the defeat of Israel and the victory of the pagan Naaman, placed in a household where her faith and her testimony were used and recorded for all time. The Lord knows what he is doing.

THE MIGHTY MAN WAS A LEPER.

This mighty man Naaman for all his valour, though he had two masters, yet he was a leper. Oh, what a cursed, dreadful word was that, "a leper". It was a sentence to death, to painful, shameful, ignominious death. You were an outcast for fear of contagion. The fear and horror of the word in the ancient world was similar to our word 'cancer'. It arouses deep emotions of mortality, fear, anxiety and horror. But leprosy was worse. So many of our cancers are treated and we do not send cancer patients out of society. The Bible tells us that pride goes before a fall. The pride of

place that this man had, the mighty, victorious general, made the fall into leprosy so much more poignant and tragic. This week we have seen the tragedy of the Premier of Western Australia succumb to depression, a dreadful, sad, debilitating disease. It is awful when any one is struck down, but it screams out something is wrong when a premier, Rhodes Scholar, Best Man to Tony Blair, a great one, is cut down. We know, there, but for the grace of God, go I. This world is not right,. Death, not life, reigns in us.

BUT THE SLAVE GIRL HAD LOVE AND FAITH.

What a girl she was. She does not rejoice in her captor's captivity, nor laugh at his misfortune. She does not celebrate in his downfall. She loves, gives good advice, helpful, saving, healing advice to her mistress. This is love, to give for the benefit of the other, especially when it is your enemy.

This is Christ-like, who shows the love of God in his death for sinners. But it was not just love she demonstrated. It was also faith. In verse 3, *"Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."* Such wonderful, childlike, simple faith and confidence in God's prophet, Elisha, who was a man well known for his miracles. He was the prophet of Yahweh used by God at this moment in history. Her faith, trust and confidence was in God and his prophet. He was the God who gave Naaman victory in battle. He was the God who gave her into Naaman's hand, the God who can do anything, who can give life to the dead, healing to the leper.

Leprosy is not the last word, cancer is not the last word, death Is not the last word. God – the Lord – he will have the first and the last word. The slave girl knew it and testified to it, even in the house of her captivity

It did not look as if Yahweh was so powerful. It looked as if the Syrians were more powerful, unless you know verse 1 – *the Lord had given victory*. But when the scene moves from Syria to Israel in v.6 we see the contrast of,

THE KING AND THE PROPHET.

Our unknown heroine of faith, she knew the prophet could do it. But the king of Israel had no such faith. He saw in the arrival of Naaman the king of Syria picking a fight with him, *"If you cannot heal my general" (and nobody can), then I will come and punish you."* The king was right. *"Am I God, to kill and to make alive?"* for only God can do this and the king is not God. But the king was wrong, in not turning the matter immediately over to God. We should turn all matters over to God, small and large and how much more, the matters that only God can deal with.

Note the contrast with the servant girl but also with the prophet Elisha. Verse 8 *"Let him come here to find the true prophet of the living God"*. The prophet had faith in God and his healing power. That is what the whole Naaman event shows.

FAITH IN GOD.

We are going to look more at this event in the next weeks, but already the scene is set by the heroine of faith. Faced with an impossible situation she knew God for whom all things are possible