

Sermon 23.11.12

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PEACE WITH OTHERS: Peacemakers eat with their enemies.

2 Kings 6:8-23

Once when the king of Aram was at war with Israel, he took counsel with his officers. He said, 'At such and such a place shall be my camp.' But the man of God sent word to the king of Israel, 'Take care not to pass this place, because the Arameans are going down there.' The king of Israel sent word to the place of which the man of God spoke. More than once or twice he warned such a place so that it was on the alert.

The mind of the king of Aram was greatly perturbed because of this; he called his officers and said to them, 'Now tell me who among us sides with the king of Israel?' Then one of his officers said, 'No one, my lord king. It is Elisha, the prophet in Israel, who tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedchamber.' He said, 'Go and find where he is; I will send and seize him.' He was told, 'He is in Dothan.' So he sent horses and chariots there and a great army; they came by night, and surrounded the city.

When an attendant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. His servant said, 'Alas, master! What shall we do?' He replied, 'Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them.' Then Elisha prayed: 'O LORD, please open his eyes so that he may see.' So the LORD opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. When the Arameans came down against him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, and said, 'Strike this people, please, with blindness.' So he struck them with blindness as Elisha had asked. Elisha said to them, 'This is not the way, and this is not the city; follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek.' And he led them to Samaria.

As soon as they entered Samaria, Elisha said, 'O LORD, open the eyes of these men so that they may see.' The LORD opened their eyes, and they saw that they were inside Samaria. When the king of Israel saw them he said to Elisha, 'Father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?' He answered, 'No! Did you capture with your sword and your bow those whom you want to kill? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink; and let them go to their master.' So he prepared for them a great feast; after they ate and drank, he sent them on their way, and they went to their master. And the Arameans no longer came raiding into the land of Israel.

SERMON

This may be a strange question to begin a sermon with - but how many of you have a tattoo? Raise your hands. How many have a family member who has a tattoo? Nearly 1 in 3 Americans have at least one tattoo. 1/3 of us. They hold all sorts of stories.

Tattoos and peace makers - we'll get back to that. Let's start with our scripture.

The books of 1 and 2 Kings primarily provide a history of the nation of Israel. Interspersed within the somewhat dry historical narrative are several quirky stories about the prophet Elijah and his successor, Elisha.

Today's narrative is one of those over-the-top stories, with Elisha mysteriously thwarting the king of Aram's military strategy.

The king sending an entire army with horses and chariots to capture one man .

But that's okay because God has *even more* invisible horses and chariots around the city and somehow managed to blind the entire Aramean army.

That blind army unquestioningly follows this unknown man; the man they were sent to kill, and their eyes are opened when they are in Samaria, at the mercy of the king of Israel—a king who, on the instructions of the prophet Elisha, decides to feed rather than attack the enemy forces.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly which piece of the story is the most unbelievable .

And perhaps that is precisely the point: the ways of God are so very different from the ways of humans that we can scarcely believe them .

Humans try to plot, scheme, and keep secrets, but in God, all things are known.

Humans default to fear, but God says "Do not be afraid ."

Humans create categories of "friend" and "enemy," while God urges all to sit together at the table.¹

The last line of today's reading is particularly worth noting: "And the Arameans no longer came raiding into the land of Israel" (2 Kings 6:23 NRSV) .

This story is not about one thwarted attack but rather the end of a *cycle* of animosity and violence that plagued both nations .

Lasting peace - without bloodshed - God brings lasting peace brought about by feeding the enemy and sending him home. Elisha's seeing possibility where it was least expected.

¹ Harader, Joanna.

https://dhjkhxawhe8q4.cloudfront.net/mennomedia-wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/14160913/Current_2023_WorshipResources.pdf

Peacemakers live in possibility.

Can you even imagine an end to the never ending cycle of violence that plagues our world?

We put stickers on maps... we light candles and stand in silence with those across the globe.

In so many countries, and in our own, we, at least I, am not tuned into the violence that takes place. Mexico has been in the top 5 of countries for fatalities related to armed conflict in the past 5 years. Mexico. Last year Ethiopia topped the list, well above Ukraine.

Sometimes it's hard to hold onto a belief that God desires peace - and joins us in the quest for a peace-filled world.

We sang: "Put peace into each other's hands and like a treasure hold it, protect it like a candle flame, with tenderness enfold it."

We sitting in these pews may feel helpless to stem the global violence we see - but we can share peace, in tangible ways. We can hold onto the possibility of new life, new relationship being born out of dark times.

Our scripture today had some seeing the invisible - God's protection surrounding them, and others losing sight - not seeing what was directly in front of them.

And all along the way, God's presence is known by Elisha, the one who leads them.

Here's a story of some who work to make the visible invisible - a story of hope, love, possibility and new beginnings - a story of bringing peace in unexpected places.

So, while nearly 1 in 3 Americans have at least one tattoo², many with meaningful stories - some carry stories hidden and unwanted.

Massachusetts General Hospital dermatologist Shadi Kourosch learned early in her career, while volunteering in a tattoo removal clinic, that some tattoos serve as a kind of covert branding, marking gang members or sex-trafficking victims.³

² [One-third of Americans are tattooed, study findsThe Hillhttps://thehill.com > enrichment > arts-culture > 41609...](https://thehill.com/enrichment/arts-culture/41609...)

³ <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2023/10/dermatologist-removes-tattoos-to-give-former-gang-members-fresh-start/>

She tells of a patient she had who grew up on the streets, needed protection, and entered a gang at the age of 14. Somehow he escaped that life by the time he became an adult; got an education, had a job and a family. One day, he was out walking and members of an opposing gang recognized the tattoo on his arm. All of his work to create a safe, meaningful life vanished in an instant. The gang ran him over with a car, beat him, and left him for dead.

Thankfully he survived and found the Radiance Clinic, a laser tattoo-removal program Dr. Kourosh started in the Boston area, to erase those enduring reminders on individuals seeking to forge a new life and escape past traumas.

That man, left for dead, came to her and said, "You have to get this off of me. I'll never be safe."

The Radiance Clinic is but one of many places around the world - in India, in Hong Kong, around our country, doing the work of removing signs of violence and forced enslavement - the work of peace.

Dr. Kourosh and others like her are some of our modern day bringers of peace, ministering to those who desire new life - a life free of violence and oppression.

"Put peace into each other's hands and like a treasure hold it, protect it like a candle flame, with tenderness enfold it."

My friends, each of us, in our little ways, can spread the table cloth, can peace into each other's hands, can protect the flame, creatively spreading peace.