

Collect, Readings and Reflection for 6 July 2025, 3rd Sunday after Trinity

Collect *(the Church's prayer for today):*

God our saviour,
look on this wounded world
in pity and in power;
hold us fast to your promises of peace
won for us by your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

READINGS: 2 Kings 5.1-end; Gal 6: 7-10

The Grenfell Tower fire in June 2017 is one of those disasters that stay with us all. I guess you can remember the sight of the exterior of the building on fire, with firefighters unable to get in through windows, as they had planned to do in an emergency, and tenants unable to get out. Their only option was to escape down stairs blocked by other people, by darkness and by dense toxic smoke. The subsequent headlines were about political failure at local and national levels, fire service failure, and – most wretched for me – the disaster of a building recently refurbished by a construction industry wholly unable to deliver a safe block of flats.

Who did help the lucky residents who were able to escape? Who cared for them after they'd lost their homes, members of their family, neighbours? Who cared for the firefighters also traumatised?

Local mosques, churches, community centres, and schools opened their doors without question. People formed human chains to sort donations, patrolled streets for safety, and offered what they had: time, hands, prayers, presence. Survivors were not pitied so much as accompanied.

The story didn't end in Ladbroke Grove. Nearly 300 miles away, a mother in Cornwall, Esmé Page, asked: What can we do? Within days, a Facebook post turned into a movement: Cornwall Hugs Grenfell was born. Over the following months, more than 500 survivors, neighbours, and first responders were welcomed into homes, B&Bs, and cottages across Cornwall. Not for counselling, not for programmes. But simply for a breathing space for the soul, and friendship.

There were surf lessons, cream teas, handwritten notes, and quiet evenings watching the tide go out. Children who had fallen silent after trauma found words again after afternoons rock-pooling. Adults who had not slept in peace found rest in the embrace of open skies and strangers who had become companions. One host said, "We offered a bed, but we received a story. And that story has enlarged our hearts."

The people with power and government money to spend on construction or providing a fire service or managing housing, and official titles, failed a largely immigrant

community. But unknown folk who never hit the news provided real love and healing and restoration. Communities who don't know each other can help each other, share love, and grow together in the things that make life worth living. That is the unknown story of Grenfell.

I want to talk today about the Old Testament story of Naaman, which has observations and lessons for us today.

Firstly, three observations.

Firstly, I notice that Naaman's position didn't prevent him being ill, and his pride nearly prevented his healing. Naaman thought of himself as a great man, and that is how he was treated, by servants, soldiers and kings. He became proud and that pride created hurt when his greatness was ignored. It was Naaman's servants who understood how hurt his pride was, when Elisha didn't honour the arrival of such an important man, and sent a message to him to go and wash in the Jordan – the simplest of tasks. They suggested "If the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he tells you 'Wash and be clean'." How we sometimes spoil our own lives! When Naaman humbled himself, on the advice of servants, he went down to the river, he washed and became clean.

Secondly, I notice that power and influence were quite separate. *Power* lay with the commander of the army, and with the two kings of Aram and Israel. Their efforts to cure Naaman caused an international incident. The *influence* came from a young girl, a foreigner, who was brave enough to suggest to her mistress how Naaman might be healed. And it came from Naaman's servants who boldly told their master a home truth. If the media had followed this story, they would have got the wrong end of the stick because they would have asked the wrong people.

Thirdly, I notice that Naaman took along lots of money and lots of fine clothes to pay for what he assumed would be expensive. But he discovered that healing is free of charge from a God whom he learns to worship in place of his own. God loves foreigners, even army commanders, even those who have fought Israel. And that love is free. But Gehazi tells a different story: it is that money can be an obstacle to us, and can even kill us.

What can we learn? What can we learn from the servant girl, from the idea that power and influence are quite separate, and that the media can confuse our understanding? I wonder if it is the lesson that we should seek to be influential, but shouldn't seek power? For example, consider prayer: it's wholly without apparent power – our poor words, often careless and half-asleep, are often little more than babble. Yet, we believe, prayer is influential, for God listens and things may change as a result – not least we ourselves. Or that we should listen with care to ensure we're listening to *truth*, not to those with the *loudest voices*? Most of all we learn that it is possible to serve God without power, and to have the strongest influence for God and for good from the positions of least power if we have faith enough to trust, and courage enough to offer that faith to others. Oh what we can learn from that servant girl!

What do we learn from the pride of Naaman, which nearly cost him his life? That pride leads to a fall; that the way of life is the road of humility; that we all need help, and need the humility to receive what God offers. When I was a teenager, and thinking about whether I would become a Christian, I recall hearing a tv interview of a professor of biology called Derek from Exeter University describing what had brought him to faith. He said this: "I realised that I needed help as a person, and that Jesus offered me that help." His humility helped me come to faith.

What do we learn in this story about money? We learn that money cannot buy the most valuable aspects of life: our health, our life itself and the love of God to us. These are gifts. The gifts we have been given are more valuable to us than everything we own.

And we learn that the love of money can become for us the root of all evil. This is the lesson that our New Testament reading from Galatians reinforces. "We reap what we sow." How we use our money tells the story of what we value most. So, in the words of Galatians: "God cannot be mocked... Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

Finally, I want to apply these lessons to us as a community here at St James. We are at an interesting time in the life of our church, and I'm going to speak candidly in Jonathan's absence. Brothers and sisters, we are fortunate in our vicar. He has the faith and humility of the servant girl alongside the skills of Naaman. He has challenged us to be a blessing to our community, and in particular he is challenging us to think through what we might do with this building to serve our community. It's vacant 6 days / week. What shall we use it for? How might we serve our community? That's the question facing the PCC and especially the Development committee.

Now think back to that story of the people who served the community after the Grenfell fire. They weren't powerful, but they were influential. They weren't perfect but they did have faith that they could offer healing to traumatised people. They weren't rich but they were generous. And they grew richer in the things that matter as they shared what they had.

We are a people with good news, but faith sometimes little bigger than a mustard seed. We are a people with a fine but largely empty building and with little idea how to use it. We have a fine leader, with excellent project management skills who is offering to lead us in re-ordering it. Do we get the question we are being asked? Are we praying for God to show us how we can serve our community? Are we willing for our mustard seed faith to grow, as Naaman's did, to see this come to pass? Are we willing to be powerless but still influential, like the servant girl and like Jonathan? Are we willing to give God enough of our money to be sacrificial, to demonstrate that our goal isn't to serve ourselves, but to reap a harvest for God's kingdom?

That's our challenge today. Let's discuss it over coffee, and in our homes, and at PCC. Let's pray for it daily. Let's ask God to grow our faith. Let's see God work in Woodside.

Amen.

