

## February 15<sup>th</sup> Quinquagesima.

Only 50 days to Easter.

*2 Kings 5: 1-14, I Corinthians 9: 24-27, Mark 1: 40-45*

Shrove Sunday.

We anticipate Lent with 40 days without counting the Sundays. What will we do to journey in our faith; to journey with Jesus in a special way? I have some lovely family activities books. I did ask you to give 40 different words we might think about over Lent. One a day. Here is my envelope. I will ask for one to be pulled out. We will reflect on the word then discuss it together.

What does the word say to you today?

From Ash Wednesday take a word each day. Put it on a saucer or on the 40 day grid or on your calendar. Reflect on the word at odd times during the day. Be grateful for what you have learnt each night. Imagine each word as a step on the journey. Take an extra envelope if you think it would help another person or email the word to someone each day. Seek to bless another's life.

Naaman, the great Syrian commander, had stolen a little girl from Israel to live in his household and serve his wife. She had suffered the horrific experience of being kidnapped and being taken away from her family, her people and her friends. We cannot know what she suffered in that totally awful experience. With great courage she chose not to be defeated by her experience – she did not sulk in her captivity, although she had every right to be uncooperative, but chose to be positive – to learn the new language and live with the customs of the Syrians without losing her own heritage and faith. When she discovered that Naaman her famous master had leprosy, which if it progressed would mean he would have to resign all his powerful positions, leave home and be considered unclean, she offers the young person's supreme confidence in her God and his prophet and suggested he go to Israel for healing. He had to discuss the matter with the King of Syria, who agreed that he should go to Israel for help. The little girl, who is nameless, had spoken about the prophet Elisha being able to heal; not the King of Israel, but the commander automatically went to the most powerful person, with lots of goods to pay the expected charges for the royal healer.

There nearly was an incident, an excuse for war. The King of Israel was no healer of leprosy and couldn't believe the claim for healing was any more than an excuse for another war.

Luckily Elisha reminded the king that he could help. But Naaman had figured that his healing would be done on a grand scale with due honour and respect towards him and was insulted when Elisha sent out his servant to tell him to go and wash in the River Jordan; he was so humiliated and angry that he nearly turned on his heel and took off. His servants reminded him that he would have done some great act if asked to so why not simply, 'wash and be clean?'

The first and perhaps the greatest healing had to be that of Naaman's attitude, his assumption of rights because of who he was. We all need God's grace – and it is a gift freely given yet requires an attitude of humility, a recognition of our need and a willingness to embrace with joy the wonder of God's mercy.

Naaman was finally in the right state of mind and spirit to receive what God was giving. Returning to Elisha he declares his faith and offers to pay. Quite properly Elisha declines – God's grace cannot be bought and while a gift in thanksgiving may be appropriate it is never payment to God for services rendered.

Let us move to Jesus' time. Another leper. This person had lost his social relationships; he called out the hated but necessary cry to keep others away.

"Unclean! Unclean!"

Jesus was moved by the sight of the leper, moved by his plea for help and moved by his humble act of kneeling. He was angry to find a person disfigured with disease. With compassion he touched the man. What a statement! If you choose you can make me clean.

Children may ask for help in the same way as they run to an adult friend or parent or perhaps an older brother or sister to comfort them after a fall.

To some people around him Jesus now was unclean himself, having touched these unacceptable outcast people. So they banished him from their presence.

The man who was healed found it impossible to keep the news to himself, so did not follow Jesus' advice. He told everyone his news. Jesus could not minister as he had wished for; while understandably everyone wanted to be healed he had an eternal message of greater importance.

For a period of time he stayed in the countryside.

Three questions to conclude with today.

Who will we meet this Lent?

Whose lives will we touch?

What healing will we need?