

London District Synod, 10th September 2011

LEADERS FOR CHANGING TIMES

Morning worship

Video as Synod gathers – You're the God of this city

(view online:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VxUr8eLXUg&feature=youtube_gdata.)

Including words from Psalm 127.1-2

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain.

Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.

This video contains images that help set the scene of our context for ministry as well as some of the work of local church communities already in action.

As the video fades out the band will pick up this song for everyone to join in with:

Song: Let us build a house where love can dwell (All are welcome) *Marty Haugan*

Prayer

Blessed are you, Lord our God,
Giver of life,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
At the opening of this day
you call us out of darkness
into your marvellous light.
Blessed are you for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Hymn God whose almighty word *John Marriot*

Introduction

Our worship this morning began with a video containing some images of events and situations that have formed part of our context for ministry over the past months.

Given the pivotal role of London within UK politics, the economic and social diversity of different communities across the capital, and all that has been happening here, culminating in the August riots and looting, we thought it important today to provide an opportunity for us to reflect on our context and explore a little of what our role is as we seek to share the good news of Jesus throughout Greater London and the surrounding areas and improve the

wellbeing of people and their communities as the people of God called Methodist within the London District.

To help us do this we have changed the Synod agenda a little in order to give us time to meaningfully think about the role of leadership - who exercises it, how we can avoid frustration and arrogance, and what it means to lead for change and new life in a community, whether urban, suburban or rural.

We will hear from some who are at work for healing in our city, and we will reflect on what has happened since the violence of the August riots.

In a moment, as we continue in worship, we will hear the story of Naaman, from 2 Kings – a story with several different kinds of leadership, and leaders. It's a story of collaborative leadership in a time of crisis – and tells the truth also about moments when leadership almost fails.

Later this morning, we will spend more time with this scripture, unpacking our own reactions and then looking at the relevance for our situation within the London District.

But first as we hear the story we ask you to think about which of the following five characters you most identify with (their names are on the papers on your table)

- Do you identify with the **Hebrew slave girl** - in a strange land, stolen and alone from her family, who actually has some leadership to give, but is low in power? Why should anyone listen to her?
- Or perhaps you identify with **Naaman's wife**, who never gets to speak in the text, but acts as a bridge to put her husband together with the knowledge that will heal him?
- Do you identify with **Naaman**, the middle manager warrior with a secret sore that won't go away? Everyone expects Naaman to be a big man, but he is desperate with this disease. And he is responsible for everyone else's safety - if he is ill, they are all in trouble.
- Or perhaps you identify with the **Hebrew King**, who feels overwhelmed and knows he will get the blame if Naaman doesn't get healed, but who has no power?
- Or do you identify with **Naaman's servants**, who convince him to try washing in the foreign river when he gets angry?

Now I know there are other characters in the story, but we don't have time to consider them all this morning..... but I'm told by those who have prepared this study that you are free to stay on after synod and be Elisha or the King of Aram, if you want.!

Listen carefully to the scriptures and see who you most identify with. After the reading there will be a few minutes of quiet for us to reflect and pray.

But now, listen for what the Spirit is saying to the church.....

2 Kings 5.1-19 (5 readers)

Narrator (Nar)

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favour with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress,

Slave Girl

If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.'

(Nar) So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. And the king of Aram said, *'Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel.'*

He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, *'When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy.'* When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said,

Hebrew King

Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me.

Nar But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, *'Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.'* So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house.

Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, *'Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.'* But Naaman became angry and went away, saying,

Naaman (N)

I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?'

Nar He turned and went away in a rage. But his servants approached and said to him,

Servants

Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, "Wash, and be clean"?"

Nar So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said,

N 'Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel; please accept a present from your servant.'

Nar But Elisha said, 'As the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will accept nothing!' He urged him to accept, but he refused. Then Naaman said,

N If not, please let two mule-loads of earth be given to your servant; for your servant will no longer offer burnt-offering or sacrifice to any god except the Lord. But may the Lord pardon your servant on one count: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow down in the house of Rimmon, when I do bow down in the house of Rimmon, may the Lord pardon your servant on this one count.'

Nar He [Elisha] said to him, 'Go in peace.'

Silence *to reflect on which character you most identify with*

Song Speak, O Lord, as we come to you

Keith Getty

Prayer

Lord our God,
as with all creation
we offer you the life of this new day,
give us the grace to love and serve you
to the praise of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

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Introduction to the theme of Synod

We've identified that one of the key priorities within the London District is the development of leadership

The London Course is a fantastic example of finding new ways to develop new preachers as lay leaders and we're delighted that there are 29 people on the course and a waiting list of others who would like to be on it.

Superintendents are wanting to learn and grow and they have committed themselves to being trained in pastoral supervision. The Authorised Ministries commission wants to discover why it is that more ministers are not taking up the offer of financial support to help them learn and grow.

The Congregational development commission is overseeing the MEDAL 2012 initiative which seeks to develop lay leadership within the life of the District.

We'll be hearing a little more about some of those this afternoon, but this morning, guided by the Social Responsibility Commission, we simply could not ignore what happened in the streets of so many of our communities in August.

It was an interesting experience for me having travelled to Ghana to share in the 50th anniversary of the church's autonomy – an amazing celebration with 15,000 people in the central Accra stadium and having met not only with church leaders but the President of the Country, the Second Deputy Speaker and the Chief Justice – two of which had been educated within Methodist schools - to land at Heathrow on the morning after the riots on the streets of Tottenham and not to know anything about it until I was drinking coffee after a morning service.

Interesting to move between cultures and recognise once again that what is possible in one context is very different in another and can't simply be replicated here.

Interesting – because it had not been captured in worship. (Why is our worship so often divorced from what is happening around us?)

Interesting because as I rushed home to see what was happening – I proudly saw Valentin Dedji, our minister in Tottenham, right at the centre of it all behind those speaking on the news, conscious that his leadership and hard work in building community relations and being a presence on the ground was bearing fruit even at the point where it had been undermined.

Interesting as I phoned around the Superintendents and heard the stories of what was happening on our streets and engaged with my ecumenical colleagues and heard stories not only of destruction, but of helping hands, and open doors,

and of responses that disrupted the ordinary lives of so many – I was fortunate it only interrupted my planned trip to see the final episode of Harry Potter! – but mothers were on the streets trying to find milk for children as vast areas of London were simply locked down.

Interesting as I joined with other church leaders here at Westminster to pray for our nation. An event which began by urging us to hold a mirror up to ourselves to understand how we have contributed to what happened.

What has happened must spur us on as Methodists in London to engage pastorally and prophetically in the communities in which our churches are located and in the wider region.

And to begin to help us to do that I'm delighted to welcome Paul Morison who is a member of the Connexional Team who is also very much part of the London District. Paul is a member of the Joint Public Issues Team – a team that works on behalf of the Baptist, URC and Methodist Churches to help us to speak with knowledge and conviction and understanding as churches into the key issues of today.

We're delighted Paul's here with us this morning to set our reflections on leadership and our response to the riots in a wider context.