

## **“Bigs and Littles”**

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Congregational Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts  
July 3, 2022 – Fourth Sunday after Pentecost  
2 Kings 5:1-14; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

I am very happy to report that we just experienced a very successful week of Vacation Bible Blast after a two-year-long break from this meaningful summer program for children. It was wonderful to be here each day with a dozen or so energetic young ones and as many enthusiastic adult and youth volunteers, all lovingly led by the intrepid (and very tired) Donna Wall, to learn about how God’s love through Jesus powers us up to live in love as God desires. This lesson was taught to our kids through stories, songs, science experiments, and sports, and they themselves proclaimed God’s message to one another through their happy singing and shouting. This year, most of our participants were little little ones, also known as shorts, which presented plenty of challenges for our leaders, but minimal tears were shed and maximal happy squeeks and squawks were heard as our cheerful little group replaced the emptiness and silence found in the halls of our church the last two summers with the joyful sounds and sights of abundant and exuberant life. Our children are a great blessing to our church, and Donna and our other leaders are also a great blessing to us, our children, and their families for leading this life-giving program. Thank you, Donna and leaders, for your service!

It is very true that here at the First Congregational Church in Stoneham, we care about our shorts, the littlest people among us. We care about them and we care for them. We also receive God’s care from them as they fill our church with messages of God’s love. Proclaiming through their happy sounds God’s words of love, they truly are God’s prophets among us -- happy, little, unexpected prophets.

Indeed, God speaks and works through the littles of all shapes and sizes, right down to the shortest of shorts. And this is how our wise God has chosen to speak throughout time. The little story of today’s reading from 2 Kings offers us this very lesson. One of its characters, Naaman, was one of the bigs who had a big problem. In the place where he lived, Aram, he was a celebrated big, being the chief general of the nation’s army. He was a mighty warrior and a great and

esteemed man, the loftiest of the lofty. But even with his bigness, and the loftiness of his privilege, he had a humbling skin disease.

But he found help from an unnamed little girl who was enslaved, having been taken away from Israel by the Aram, modern Syria, during one of their raids to conquer and plunder their neighbor Israel. In Aram, as an enslaved, foreign girl, she was the lowest of the lowly. But even from her location as one of the littlest littles she spoke God's great big truth, that healing power could be found in the God of Israel. And so the servant of Naaman's wife, the little from Israel, in speaking God's truth to help someone find health, became a prophet of the most-high God.

Lofty Naaman rode down to Israel with mighty horses and chariots, not in conquest, but seeking healing from another lofty (but less so) person in Yahweh's prophet Elisha. As a celebrity, high and mighty Naaman expected to receive a celebrity's welcome and for the prophet to offer some flashy, dramatic healing gesture, but the red carpet was not rolled out, the paparazzi did not show up to draw the scene on clay tablets, and Elisha didn't even bother to step out of his house, but rather sent a messenger to tell Naaman to wash seven times in Israel's humble Jordan River to be healed. Too-big-for-his-britches Naaman at first refused to do what was required, for it seemed to him to be a humiliating gesture to have to wash in the river of a less powerful people, but his lowly servants -- more littles -- asked him to reconsider and humble himself by taking a dip in the Jordan. He did so and he was healed, his skin becoming restored and healthy like the skin of a child -- healthy like a little.

Naaman's healing of his diseased skin, and perhaps of some of his illness of pride, began with hearing a word being proclaimed by a little, unnamed, conquered, foreign slave girl. The prophetic, healing word came from a little and still comes from littles *and* bigs and all of us in between. In this season after Pentecost, we are reminded that God's Spirit breathes life into all of us and works through all of us, even our shorts. We are all prophets, speakers of God's truth. We are all apostles, ones who are sent out into the world to do God's work. We are all healers, empowered to speak and act in ways that restore and renew. Even if we seem small and insignificant, we are all empowered agents of the most-high God.

Let us claim our lofty position and speak and act in the world in ways that make it new. Let us be eager to listen to the littles among us and to recognize in their voices the voice of the still-speaking God. Let us be willing to go where they call us to go to find restoration and wholeness. Let us be champions of the littles of all sizes, especially the least among us.

And this day, may our fellowship of bigs and littles grow in love that we all might be made new and that we would come ever closer to the realization of God's realm of love here and throughout the world. Amen.