

## Opening our eyes to the possible

Menno Mennonite Church  
August 4, 2024

**Purpose:** To enlarge our sense of the possible in the work of peace.

**Message:** Peace holds the possibility of God doing what God will do beyond human imagination.

Based on *Seeking Peace Together* resources week 10

**Scripture:** 2 Kings 6:8-23 (I will read); Psalm 46 (Please read)

**Synopsis:** “The way things are” holds a mystical power within us. It is a description of what is and how things are, often supplanting the need or cause for any hope what so ever. It is frequently where we end up, releasing the world as it is into that which is beyond us. But this is not what God calls us to. Faith invites us, always, into the possibility of things, well beyond what we *expect* to be in our lives, The story of God and God’s people leads us time and again to challenge our thinking and expectations, and see God’s hope that far exceeds our own.

## 2 Kings 6:8-23

<sup>8</sup> 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."  
<sup>9</sup> 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."

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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?"

<sup>12</sup> 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."

<sup>13</sup> He said, "Go and find where he is; I will send and seize him."  
He was told, "He is in Dothan."

<sup>14</sup> So he sent horses and chariots there and a great army;  
they came by night, and surrounded the city.

<sup>15</sup> 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?"

<sup>16</sup> He replied, "Do not be afraid,  
for there are more with us than there are with them."

<sup>17</sup> Then Elisha prayed: "O Lord, please open his eyes 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.

<sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> When the king of Israel saw them he said to Elisha,  
“Father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?”

<sup>22</sup> 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.”

<sup>23</sup> 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.

As much as I am committed to the way of peace and non-resistance—fully and whole heartedly—I do appreciate the study of military history. My understanding of the way of the kingdom and the need for the love of the enemy holding sway well above the call to duty and the ingenuity of military ventures does not stop me from being frequently fascinated by the courage and cunning of what happens on the battle field. I recall being transfixed by the Ken Burns documentary *The Civil War*, squinting at it through the fuzz of a late 80's antenna TV, seeing it for the first time and appreciating the blending of human story and structural tragedy. I have gone to Gettysburg and walked the fields of Pennsylvania and wondered at the bigness of it all, in awe of the history and sacrifice; saddened by the waste of warfare, no matter the age and time. Perhaps it is just fundamentally guy thing, but there is a lot too respecting the working of soldiering in every generation, even while wishing that the occupation could at long last be finally retired. There is much to learn and honor in knowing the histories of our wars—the heroic and the painful—even as a person committed to the way of peace.

In the long list of great military engagements, I am guessing that the one of our story this morning does not make it into too many tactical manuals in the various colleges where they study such things. Come to that, I am guessing this particular engagement makes it into our various selections of good stories of the Bible if we know it at all. One, it is in the long history of the kings where many a bible-reading-in-a-year program goes to die for want of discipline (at least that has proven the case for me) as we work at slogging through the fairly ongoing battles of kingship and workings of the king. For just a quick reminder here, 2 Kings is the history of the kings after the time of David and his direct descendants where the demands of power and principle lead the nation of Israel into every conceivable conundrum and eventually into Babylonian exile. The warning that was given when the people wanted a king in the first place—that they would lord it over the people and find power corrupting—has proven repeated and disastrously true, with the prophets serving as counterpoint to the ways that the kings time and again seek to apply human power in the midst of being chosen by the divine. Time and again the politics of God is placed against the politics of the “how things are”. Most of the time, the powers that be ignore the prophets on a good day, or try to get them killed otherwise. But the results are fairly predictable.

The second reason that this is not a story that we spend a lot of time on militarily or theologically is that it doesn't make sense to us. It is not the world in which we live. We know

what is real; we know what works and doesn't. This isn't it: invisible chariots of fire and horses—the tanks and superweapons of ancient warfare—are not countable assets when planning a battle. We *might* take this story as a moralistic tale, sure, but is this how God really does war? What's more, what does this have to do with us and our world, real or not?

Let me answer the second question first. This is not just an academic exercise or a question of moving companies and battalions around the board like so many toy soldiers to see “what if”. I think this is entirely applicable to the life that we live. Because we deal with these issues all the time. We have people with whom we struggle to be in the same room. We have histories and conflicts that have festered long and gone sour. We have those co-workers that have stabbed us in the back and have done us harm, sometimes intensely so. We all have enemies that we struggle with liking, let alone loving if we are given to telling the truth. While we cannot and should not even begin to entertain the fundamental narcissism that would assume that our enemies and God's enemies are one and the same or that God fights for his faithful unreservedly with overwhelming force (we all must entertain the rather disturbing thought that God is not automatically on our side, or on either side come to that), we must take notes on *how* God fights as a way of emulating and knowing more of the king who we follow. This brings us back around to the first question. Yes, this is how God fights—to make true peace and to call the kingdom into being time and again not through the short term-tit-for-tat revenges that makes the whole world blind, but in the full shalom making relationship building complexity of the living God that would not just win the war, but heal the peace at the same time.

In order to do that we must acknowledge our need for a change in our vision of reality. Watch a reality show and you will get a full taste of it: reality is that the one who best manipulates and contrives wins the game, and what is life but a game where there can only be winners and losers. Life in the real world demands the unyielding pursuit of self interest and self power above all else. The only good [enemy] is a dead [enemy]—fill in the blank there for the undesirable of the day and you are in the bumper stick business. We are given the world as us versus them because it is the version of the world that gives the persons forming the US and the THEM the most power.

We all need special glasses—special vision. The truth is that we like Elisha's servant see things as they really are. It was one of the fundamental temptations offered in the garden: eat of the fruit that you might see as God sees [Genesis 3:5]. Eyes were opened with that fundamental

temptation, but were opened to the wonders of sin and brokenness, but closed to the grace and presence of God.

We all need spiritual glasses that would correct this fundamental error. Throughout history YHWH God comes along side and portrays true reality for us. God's intervention almost always reveals the bigger truth at work behind what we see as barriers to us. Think of Hagar, Moses, Peter, the Emmaus Road, Damascus road and the mount of transfiguration. Our vision is always in need of correction to see what is real real, and how God truly is.

In real world—our world—terms, the king of the Aramean raiders has this in the bag. He has the strength, the plans, but somehow he is being stopped. So here does what comes naturally—if you have a prophet problem, remove the prophet. Yet time and again the true world, God's world lies somewhere unseen and unknown. True power is not those of armaments and force, but in the ways of the God who saves. The first eye-opener of the story is that the real world is the world that God protects his people. But not always we the demands of war and victory but with far more comprehensive attention.

The reality check does not stop there. The second eye opener is that the real world is a world that can never be governed by the cycle of revenge and violence, but only by grace and forgiveness. We might see chariots at first, but soon enough we are given the party of sitting down to where true peace can be found. That is the hard work: seeing God's reality of forgiveness as the truest reality beyond all that we hold as just "the way things are." We are called time and again to see beyond what is and what seems to be so utterly normal in our world and to dare to envision that which is beyond what we normally expect to see and know in the day-to-day. We grow so accustomed to the way things are, to the normalcy of our hurts and arguments, petty and not too petty—we take it for granted that this is the only way things can be. Whenever it is suggested that there is something beyond this, there is an instantaneous recoil as we rattle off all the reasons it could never work, how it can be. We rationalize why it can never work. We normalize why it is beyond the pale and asks us to lay down what we value most—our pain and our hurt. We value them because they are ours; we can control them. In order to enter God' fuller reality of hope, we have to realize that there is far greater worth in the freedom that comes from the basic humanity of a shared meal.

Sometimes this is the work of persons stepping braving the crossing from the word as it is into the world as it was created to be, living there, and being surrounded by the flaming horses that are beyond our imagination. Sometime this world is figurative. Other times it is very real.

I will never forget the times where God's world has broken through. I have sat at the tables of forgiveness. I have heard the stories of the realms of protection—figurative and very real. I will always remember the testimony of the brothers and sisters I met in Colombia while visiting there. I heard for members of the church who were members of the military forces that tore that country for so many years. Their reality began to crack when they saw that the defenseless church that they were sent to infiltrate and tear apart was, and I quote “guarded day and night by men that did not sleep.” Naturally the church has no hired security; only the truest reality of God's present protection that never left them. In time, those who were sent came inside and saw the true world where God invites all to the table of forgiveness. There are stories like this all over the place throughout church history. If you want a full time devotional consider traveling to the church of other places with an open mind and a listening ear. I promise the stories you find will challenge and change.

God's reality is the real world; the world of forgiveness. It starts simple: a cup of coffee, a brave conversation, some hard listening, leaning into that which God holds as most true in this world and next. This is how we seek peace and build God's way in our midst beyond our very expectations.

May we embrace the reality of God's way, trusting the world of forgiveness. And may we know God's hand in all we as God leads us to the world as it truly is.