St Luke’s, Tutshill 12/10/25

**II Kings 5: 1-15; Luke 17: 11-19 - Baptism of Mo Jakob Abdirahman**

Prayer

Every now and then something comes along that reminds us of what really matters and why. Today we baptise Mo, give him a name, Jakob, Jacob and we gather at the Lord’s Table to take bread and drink wine as Jesus told us. It reminds us as a church family here of our core business that Jesus told us to make disciples, by going, baptising and teaching. And thanks to Mr and Mrs Parsons, James and Julia, we have just hear two stories that can help us focus on what God is calling us to be about.

We began with a Syrian military commander, called Naaman, who unfortunately contracted leprosy but heard that there was a healer in Israel, a prophet called Elisha. When he rolled up with his splendid entourage at Elisha’s place, the prophet didn’t even bother to go out to greet him but sent a message telling him to go to the river Jordan and dip himself in the river seven times and he would be healed. Naaman was very offended, hardly treated as an honoured guest – after all he was a senior commander – and told to go to that piddling little river Jordan when there are far more impressive rivers in Damascus... What Elisha told him was so undignified. It was only when his servants reminded him that he really had nothing to lose that he went and he was healed. Mo might be relieved to hear that he only goes under once not seven times this morning but hold on to this story for a moment while we jump to another encounter in Luke’s Gospel.

This time not one leper but ten of them who called out, *Jesus, Master have mercy on us!* And Jesus heard them and sent them off to the priests who were the ones who would ratify that they no longer had leprosy. Remember of course that this was a socially distancing illness – people with leprosy had to keep their distance from ordinary folk like us. They raced off, but Luke is interested in what happened next when only one of them returned to Jesus. Let’s not fall into school assembly stuff and remind ourselves that it is very important to say Thank you. True enough but there is rather more here. The unnamed fellow returned, praising God with a loud voice and prostrated himself. That’s the body language of worship. Jesus picked that up – he was the only one – not who came back to say thank you – but the only one who came back to praise the Lord. We could say that ten lepers were cured of their leprosy but only one was fully healed, because healing is spiritual as well as physical.

Both of our stories – Naaman and the unnamed leper – end in the same way. Elisha later in the chapter sends Naaman home, back to his job and life in Damascus. And Jesus tells the man, *Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.*

Now both these stories have resonance with what we are about this morning. Baptism is wonderful but it’s not the most dignified ceremony – grown men clambering into an oversized paddling pool – we’ll see how it goes, be kind. And yet it’s something we are doing in obedience to Jesus – the powerful symbol of dying and being raised – we won’t leave him in the water. In its very simplicity and humbling indignity there is spiritual power. And then we will be invited to the Lord’s table – and all you get is a tiny wafer and a sip of wine, but to do that in remembrance of Jesus and obedience to his command. There is spiritual power in that. It’s Jesus-focused; it’s in the love of God that we do this.

There’s another resonance – only one came back to Jesus. Being a committed Christian is to know you are in a minority and that there is a certain stigma attached. There are those who might think we are committing intellectual suicide – how can anyone intelligent believe this stuff we read in the Bible? Or it’s OK to go to church at Christmas and sing carols and feel nice about the baby Jesus, but as for following Christ through the rest of the year, let’s not overdo it… All that about God being love and Jesus is Lord, if you find that helpful, then I’m pleased for you, but that’s not for me. Being a committed Christian is not easy, but Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. Keep your eyes on him. The one man who returned to Jesus was praising God – be faithful in worship. Keep reading Scripture; keep praying – that will give your perspective when you find your faith challenged.

Both Naaman and the healed leper were sent on their way and we have no idea of what happened next in their lives. After midday we’ll be going our way. Mo, Jakob – into what, the future is unknown for any of us. Bishop Rachel talks about wet footprints from our baptism – into daily living. Mo, I believe that God has great things for you and he will use you in ways that you do not know yet. That is exciting and rather daunting, but for the promise of the Holy Spirit to be in you. You have been given the baptism name of Jakob, Jacob – a link with your German parents, one of the ancient patriarchs, Jacob; it has to be said, a rather flawed character who was nonetheless used by God and recognised as a patriarch across all the faiths of the Middle East. Jacob – in the New Testament James, one of the close disciples; also the name of Jesus’ brother who became an important leader in the early Church. Plenty to ponder there. Today is the beginning of the journey to find out. And for others here this baptism reminds us of our own baptism – identifying us with Jesus and sending us out on our own adventure of being a disciple. Or maybe we have not yet come to baptism – it’s free and open to all who want to follow Jesus. Let’s talk about it. But now let’s prepare for this undignified but glorious business in the pool by hearing Mo, Jakob share what’s brought him here…