

## Gracious Leadership

When has a woman in your life story displayed unconditional love to you even when you didn't feel like you deserved it? What were the circumstances? How was the unconditional love communicated and extended? How did you receive it? How did it affect you?

Read [2 Kings 6:6-23](#).

**Elisha's Predictive Power.** Is it possible to have apparently psychic powers without actually having them? Have you or someone you've known ever had a strong sense of what was happening apart from direct knowledge of the situation? Sometimes we don't have to be very attentive at all to predict the future with general accuracy – Niners fans knew early in the season that we weren't likely to make it to or win the Super Bowl after key players were injured. When we are in the bone-dry months of August into mid-November and dry lightning with high winds are forecast, it doesn't take clairvoyance to predict a high potential for wildfires.

**Horses and Chariots of Fire.** Beyond the literal meaning, what might it mean that we are always surrounded by chariots of fire and horses? Have you ever had a moment when you were so focused on your fear that you couldn't see anything else? Have you ever had a moment when something shifted and you saw things so differently that your fear melted away, at least for a time?

**Cause them Blindness.** Beyond the literal meaning of the text, have you ever known of a time when people were struck blind to reality for a moment or season? Sometimes we can be so filled with rage that we can't see straight. Sometimes in the early stages of love (or at least infatuation) we don't see straight, either. Sometimes substances cloud our vision. Sometimes – all the time, actually – the paradigms we have acquired over our lifetimes to make sense of reality also limited what we see, and we become blind to many things in plain sight.

**Elisha's Instruction and the King's Obedience.** The forces from Aram were lethal. The king of Aram wanted Elisha, Israel's king, and Israel's people dead. What do you imagine was required for Elisha and Israel's king to show them kindness instead? What was the risk? What was the potential reward?

**Peace for a while.** How do we feel about the fact that the people of Aram didn't attack in that season, but at a later time, under a different king, attacked again, causing great harm? What does this suggest about the process of achieving and maintaining peace? What is required?

**Following Jesus.** Jesus came to bring shalom – deep, lasting peace within ourselves, between all people, and with creation itself. The shalom Jesus proclaimed and practiced was founded on his confidence in the love of God, that God is all loving (and therefore not all powerful), and that it could be said that God is love. His most radical instruction to his followers was to love one's enemies. This is a decision to not follow the path that hate leads toward. It is not cowardly, but requires incredible humility and strength, confident that love leads to healing and hate leads to destruction.

Jesus modeled this again and again, even in the last hours of his life. He told Peter to put away his sword and healed the soldier Peter wounded. He chose not to engage the violence of the Jewish leaders who smacked him around. He didn't fight back against the Roman Empire. He knew his time was up, and he spent that time showing what love looks like in response to hate. He could have fought back, but it would have resulted in a quicker demise and he would be forgotten. Instead, his response of love still fascinates and lures us, inviting us to do the same.

**Holy Currency: Gracious Leadership.** We are all leaders, even if we don't immediately recognize it. We all carry influence and can lead, through our relationships, toward love. I don't know if any of you have the power to command military action – I'm not aware of it if you do – yet I am sure that you do have significant capacity to influence harm or good, division or unity, peace or enmity. We can be instruments of division with our attitudes and actions, or we can facilitate shalom.

It is easy to give into division and disagreement. We are conditioned toward that response by political voices and a news media that survives on consumerism. Shalom requires humility, listening, and trusting that love is present like horses and chariots of fire. It is a decision to follow Elisha's lead, to adhere to Proverbs 25:21-22 which surely informed Paul to instruct the same (Romans 12:20) and Jesus' instruction to love our enemies.

**A long lunch.** Last week I was at a denominational retreat of sorts where I spent time learning, listening, hanging out, and laughing with ABC-USA pastors from around the country. This was a fusion group of men and women, progressives and conservatives, and black, white, and Latinx leaders. Last year I was a presenter, talking about CrossWalk's journey, which included our evolution that led us to become LGBTQ welcoming and affirming – a lightning rod issue that is dividing Christian churches all over the country. The Evangelicals in the group weren't pleased, but they were polite. This year, I was catching up with one of the Evangelicals who has been very

concerned about this issue which appears to be irreconcilable. We both thought having a dialogue about it would be potentially beneficial. So we had lunch on Tuesday. For two and a half hours or so. We weren't trying to convince each other of our position – this wasn't about winning or losing. We were more interested in wondering what it would take to help an incredibly diverse denomination lean into unity instead of the much more common path of splintering.

It was a very good conversation. We both understood that it would be easy to retreat to our corners and focus on why our differences cannot be overcome. Neither of us thought that would get where we want to go. Instead, we both thought that staying focused on the bigness of God, of Love that is at work in all forms of faith communities. God is already working with us all despite our differences. Perhaps we should do what God is already doing? Of course, this is not at all easy. It requires us to see the humanity in each other and to trust Love and honor each other's perspective.

**Jesus' Lunch.** The story of another lunch, where Jesus had an ugly exchange with a Syrophenician woman is instructive for us. She begged him to heal her sick daughter. Instead of helping, he insulted her with a racial slur, giving into all the programming that formed him. Instead of reacting with anger, she appealed to his better angels. He was humbled and healed the foreigners daughter, providing her – a historical enemy – a feast of love and grace. She was and is a hero for making peace when it is so much easier to foster division. May we all learn from her example and do likewise.

## **2 Kings 6:8-23 MSG**

One time when the king of Aram was at war with Israel, after consulting with his officers, he said, "At such and such a place I want an ambush set."

The Holy Man, Elisha, sent a message to the king of Israel: "Watch out when you're passing this place, because Aram has set an ambush there."

So the king of Israel sent word concerning the place of which the Holy Man had warned him.

This kind of thing happened all the time.

The king of Aram was furious over all this. He called his officers together and said, "Tell me, who is leaking information to the king of Israel? Who is the spy in our ranks?"

But one of his men said, "No, my master, dear king. It's not any of us. It's Elisha the prophet in Israel. He tells the king of Israel everything you say, even what you whisper in your bedroom."

The king said, "Go and find out where he is. I'll send someone and capture him."

The report came back, "He's in Dothan."

Then he dispatched horses and chariots, an impressive fighting force. They came by night and surrounded the city.

Early in the morning a servant of the Holy Man got up and went out. Surprise! Horses and chariots surrounding the city! The young man exclaimed, "Oh, master! What shall we do?"

He said, "Don't worry about it—there are more on our side than on their side."

Then Elisha prayed, "O GOD, open his eyes and let him see."

The eyes of the young man were opened and he saw. A wonder! The whole mountainside full of horses and chariots of fire surrounding Elisha!

When the Arameans attacked, Elisha prayed to GOD, "Strike these people blind!" And GOD struck them blind, just as Elisha said.

Then Elisha called out to them, "Not that way! Not this city! Follow me and I'll lead you to the man you're looking for." And he led them into Samaria.

As they entered the city, Elisha prayed, "O GOD, open their eyes so they can see where they are." GOD opened their eyes. They looked around—they were trapped in Samaria!

When the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, "Father, shall I massacre the lot?"

"Not on your life!" said Elisha. "You didn't lift a hand to capture them, and now you're going to kill them? No sir, make a feast for them and send them back to their master."

So he prepared a huge feast for them. After they ate and drank their fill, he dismissed them. Then they returned home to their master. The raiding bands of Aram didn't bother Israel anymore.