

### Psalm 65

- <sup>1</sup> Praise is due to you,  
O God, in Zion;  
and to you shall vows be performed,
- <sup>2</sup> O you who answer prayer!  
To you all flesh shall come.
- <sup>3</sup> When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us,  
you forgive our transgressions.
- <sup>4</sup> Happy are those whom you choose and bring near  
to live in your courts.  
We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house,  
your holy temple.
- <sup>5</sup> By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance,  
O God of our salvation;  
you are the hope of all the ends of the earth  
and of the farthest seas.
- <sup>6</sup> By your strength you established the mountains;  
you are girded with might.
- <sup>7</sup> You silence the roaring of the seas,  
the roaring of their waves,  
the tumult of the peoples.
- <sup>8</sup> Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs;  
you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.
- <sup>9</sup> You visit the earth and water it,  
you greatly enrich it;  
the river of God is full of water;  
you provide the people with grain,  
for so you have prepared it.
- <sup>10</sup> You water its furrows abundantly,  
settling its ridges,  
softening it with showers,  
and blessing its growth.
- <sup>11</sup> You crown the year with your bounty;  
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.
- <sup>12</sup> The pastures of the wilderness overflow,  
the hills gird themselves with joy,
- <sup>13</sup> the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,  
the valleys deck themselves with grain,  
they shout and sing together for joy.

## 2 Kings 6:8-23

8 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.

11 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.

15 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.

20 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.

## SERMON

I would bet real, actual money that this is a story you've never heard preached before, and that most all of you in here may not have even heard before. It's a bit of a backwater pick, even relative to the stories we've been hearing this summer, many of which are lesser known. This is another story of a prophet, rather than the king proper, this time Elijah's protégé, Elisha. I picked it, even though the king is a sort of ancillary character, because it's such a great story, I couldn't pass it up. Elisha is a super weird dude, as many

of the prophets are. And oh boy, there are some great stories featuring the works God does through Elisha.

There's this one where Elisha and the prophets are down at the river, felling trees and building stuff, and one of the other guys drops his axe head in the river. And he's like, "Oh no! It's borrowed! And I lost it!" And Elisha puts a branch in the river and reverses, like, science, and makes the iron axe head float. Or how about the story where there's a famine and this random guy makes a stew of plants he finds, not knowing what they are, and just as he's about to eat it, Elisha's like, "No! Stop! It's poison! You'll die!" but they're so hungry, they just want to eat. So, Elisha adds some magic flour to the pot, and voila! It's safe to eat. There's also some classic miracles: feeding a hundred men with just a few loaves of bread, raising a child from the dead, and keeping a widow's jars of oil completely full to the brim, no matter how much she sells or uses.

A lot of Elisha's stories in scripture have the same general theme: things are bad, really bad, famine and death bad, but then God shows up, through the power of Elisha, and things work out. And that's kind of the metaphor of his life: don't be afraid of these really terrible things, God is going to show up, and we'll have enough. Not necessarily more than enough, but enough. Everything will be ok.

And then there's today's story. It's has that similar theme: don't be afraid, we'll be ok. But it takes it a step further, which I think is important.

So, as usual, Israel was at war with another local tribe, this time it was the people of Aram. The leader of Aram thinks he's being super sneaky, setting up a camp in a place where the Israelites will pass by, where they can jump out and mount a surprise attack. And in order to be sneaky about it, the king tells only his closest confidantes. But somehow, the King of Israel keeps avoiding the camp! It's impossible! He must know about them! And, of course, the King of Israel does know about them, because Elisha miraculously warns him off, again and again.

The leader of Aram is furious, blames a mole at first, but then when he finds out about this magical man of God, Elisha, commands that his troops bring him to justice, so he sends out all his horses and men, and they surround the little town where Elisha is asleep.

The next morning, Elisha's servant shakes him awake and desperately whispers to him: sir! We're surrounded! We're going to die! They're here to take you! And Elisha, classic Elisha, says, basically, oh you of little faith! Don't you know we'll be ok? I have more than enough support, and the camera pans back and we see this heavenly array of horses and flaming chariots and the very army of God surrounding the army of Aram. To be clear, this isn't the army of Israel, but instead a miraculous, heavenly presence.

But rather than attacking, Elisha mounts a trick of sorts. He prays and God strikes the army of Aram blind, and then pretending to be helpful, Elisha leads the blinded army off to Samaria, where they're surrounded by the real army of Israel, and their eyes were

opened. Which, I imagine, must have been pretty bewildering and terrifying. And like many of Elisha's miracles, this right here could be the end. Things were bad, God showed up through Elisha, the day was saved, and things were ok. But the story goes on just a bit.

The King of Israel is just as shocked, and he stammers to Elisha...should I? Should I...like...kill them? Oh, yes, that's what we do to our enemies, right? But Elisha says No! Don't kill them. Feed them. Set up a big table, fill it with good food, seat every one of these, your enemies at the table. Give them enough to eat and drink, let them be satisfied. And then send them home. You didn't capture them in battle, so they're not yours to kill.

And the King does just that. He sets up an enormous feast, feeds them, and sends them back. And you know what? The leader of Aram packed up his secret camp and left, never to bother Israel or Elisha again.

What I love about this story is the utter practicality it portrays of a commandment Jesus will later give: to love our enemies. What should you do when you have your enemy surrounded, literally at the tip of your spear? Feed them. Make sure they're taken care of, and send them on their way.

There's some resonance here with policies we might be familiar with over the last decade or two of war. This is a campaign for hearts and minds, of sorts. This is building schools and providing infrastructure and filling practical, everyday needs. This is winning over your enemies with kindness, by taking care of their basic needs, rather than subduing them with the business end of a unmanned drone.

It might have been that the King of Aram was touched by the kindness, sure. But more likely, I think, he might have just been confused. Who are these people, with the power to blind an entire army, sneakily surround us, and then choose not to kill us, but instead feed us at a great feast? Only lunatics would do that! We should stay away.

Whatever the motivation was, Elisha's story is clear: things are bad, but God shows up, and there will be enough. And not just enough for you, Elisha, or you, Israel, but there's enough even for your enemies.

In a show John and I are watching right now one of the characters repeatedly says, "kindness costs you nothing." And we've taken to repeating that phrase a lot. And even if kindness does cost a little, like in this case the outlay of food and drink for an entire enemy army, the benefit is clear: it's a heck of a lot less expensive than a full blown war with Aram. And the same is true for us, I think, on both a national level—aid and infrastructure and education and support to other nations is far less expensive than war—but more so on a personal level.

Elisha's God, whom we theoretically follow as well, makes this very clear. There's going to be enough, so share. Be kind. Your kindness costs you so little, and there will always be enough. Feed your enemy, don't kill them. See to it that others have enough, and trust that you will, as well.