

10am HC Sunday 12th October 2025 (Gift Day)

2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c, Luke 17:11-19, 2 Tim 2:8-15 – *It is when we know the grace of God that we want to give thanks to God*

I wonder whether you have ever noticed the poster, in the lobby, which asks the question:
what is church for you?

It is perhaps a particularly topical question right now, with the announcement that Sarah Mullally, Bishop of London, is to be the next Archbishop of Canterbury, the first woman to hold a post dating back to the 6th century. But this is a role that has been evolving for centuries – dramatically so when the church in England broke away from the authority of the Pope in the Reformation – and is still evolving, within the global fellowship of Anglican churches constituting the Anglican Communion.

If all that makes the job sounds a bit bureaucratic, the Archbishop of Canterbury has a very different responsibility as somebody who is expected to articulate a viewpoint - a prophetic voice, even - on issues of morality such as the Assisted Dying Bill, as well as at times of national crisis and celebration. There's an expectation that the Church of England belongs to and speaks to, and for, the people of this country, and yet the Church of England receives no government money.

We ask a lot of the Church.

But when we speak of the Church, are we more likely to be thinking of this building? The place for most significant moments in our lives: for funerals, weddings, and for when your child first sang with the choir, or when your grandchild was baptised, just as their mother or father was baptised here before them. Or when you came to this place, in fear or despair, or when it all seemed too much, and you found comfort and solace in the peace of this place and in God's presence with us. But there's no government money available to keep this place as a sacred and special place.

We ask a lot of the Church.

Or when we think of Church, are we thinking of the community that worships here Sunday by Sunday, offering themselves to God and to one another, as singers, intercessors, children's church leaders, or in any of other the other countless ways of serving the work of God in this place? Or are we thinking of the individual people that over the years we've grown to love, despite or eventually perhaps even because of, their foibles and faults, valuing a shared history of working together for the wider community. Bringing about positive change in relation to issues that matter; and discovering along the way that there can be laughter and joy in serving others.

Perhaps if we ask a lot of the Church, it is because it is in the Church that we see most fully the grace of God.

It is in the Church that we see people bearing with one another, forgiving one another and loving one another. It is over coffee after a service that I see people hearing and sharing the everyday worries of other people, offering encouragement with a hug and a prayer, or the offer of a visit to sort out a practical problem.

Every one of us brings what we can to the Church. There are so many different ways in which each one of us can be a part of the Church, whatever our situation.

Our Old Testament reading offered us a good illustration of how anybody can play their part, whoever they are. The healing of Naaman, that **great man, ... in high favour with his master ... commander of the army of the king of Aram** began with the words of a **young girl [taken] captive from the land of Israel**, so lowly that we do not even know her name, yet who knew that the grace of God could work through the prophet Elisha, and could **cure him of his leprosy**.

She offered what she could – her confidence in the grace of God – and it became a part of a chain of events that culminated in Naaman's flesh being **restored like the flesh of a young boy**. She played her part in Naaman's healing, but she wasn't the only one. Because when Naaman became angry that Elisha did not **come out and stand and call on the name of the**

Lord his God, and ...wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy; when Naaman was told to go wash in the Jordan, in the waters of Israel; it was Naaman's servants who plucked up their courage to tell Naaman that since he would have been willing to do something difficult, he shouldn't be too proud to do something as easy as washing in the river Jordan. So Naaman's servants, too, had a part to play in the healing of Naaman. They trusted in the power of God to heal Naaman.

It is knowing that God has the power to change people's lives that makes us want to do what we can to make that happen.

And it is knowing the grace of God that makes us thankful to God.

We see that in our gospel reading.

When Jesus was approached by ten lepers who asked for his help, Jesus told them **Go and show yourselves to the priests.** They were to seek the certificate of healing that under the Law of Moses would mean they could be admitted back into the community, as if they had already been cleansed. And indeed, **as they went, they were made clean.** And yet, only **one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice.** Only one of them truly appreciated the grace of God and **prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him.** As a Samaritan rather than a Jew, that one wouldn't have thought of himself as privileged to be one of God's people, but he was the only one who recognised the grace of God at work in his life and responded with gratitude.

Naaman, commander of the army of king of Aram was also an outsider to Israel, and yet Naaman wrote to the King of Israel because he had been told that it was Elisha's God – Israel's God - that could heal him. Naaman was a stranger to the benefits of the people of Israel - the children of God - and yet when Naaman was healed, Naaman said **Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel; please accept a present from your servant.** Naaman knew it was by the grace of God that he had been healed, and he responded in gratitude to God.

It is when we see the grace of God in our lives that we want to give thanks to God.

Once a year in St John's, on Gift Day, all of us have a day to think about what we want to give to St John's, not just financially, but in other ways too.

If we give, it is not because we are members of a club paying our annual membership fee or feel we can't expect any benefits if we don't keep up the subscription.

We want to give, because we want to be a part of the work of God being done in this place.

We want to give, because we are thankful for what God has already done in our lives. We love God because, even though we were outsiders, like Naaman and the Samaritan leper, God has shown us his love for us in Jesus his Son.

In the words of John 1 chapter 4 (in the first letter of John), ***we love because he first loved us.***