



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

29th September, 2023

Continuing the theme of 'background' characters in the Bible.....

Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

2 Kings 6:17

Another servant as our 'walk-on' character this weekend, and one who, we may imagine, was young, a learner, like the followers of a rabbi treading in his footsteps: Elisha's un-named acolyte and disciple.

Elisha was God's prophet when Israel was under threat, and he was being given insights into the plans and tactics of the Aramean enemy. We are told that his servant got up early and saw that the city (Dothan, v.13) was surrounded by a huge army and -as we would- he panicked! I imagine him running to Elisha, who may have been at his morning devotions (or in bed!), crying *"Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?"* (v.15).

How do you imagine the scene, -like Sir Francis Drake who is said to have calmly finished his game of bowls before dealing with the Spanish Armada? Perhaps it was something like that, as Elisha arose and gently said something that has entered our Christian vocabulary, *"Don't be afraid, those who are with us are more than those who are with them."* (v.16) And in answer to Elisha's prayer, the servant was given a gift of God's grace: *"the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."* (v.17) Such insights are amongst what St. Paul called an *"earnest of the Spirit"* -like a 'downpayment' of heaven! (See 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5.)

It is a truism to say that there is far more going on around us than our senses can perceive. St. Paul reminds us that our real enemies are *"the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."* (Ephesians 6:12). Maybe we are protected by being unable to see such things, but I wonder how it would be to see not only the forces of evil but the forces of God's protection around us. That, in a sense, was what Elisha's servant was given a momentary ability to see.

Perhaps in these days we are more conscious than ever of the insidious, invisible enemies threatening us and all we hold dear. Particularly in the age of the internet, 'cyber-wars' and harmful social media, international frictions and denial of human rights and of previously accepted truth, we are conscious of everything from the harmful effects on the young to spying and hacking and the despotic, amoral activities of dictators and multi-national interests. Like Elisha's servant we need the spiritual insight and the faith to hold onto the fact that although the forces of evil are real, and stronger than we are, God is infinitely stronger than they are. May we -like Elisha- pray in the light of that, and find the comfort given to his young servant

Lines from an old hymn by Maltbie Davenport Babcock (*quel nom!*) come to mind:

*This is my Father's world:
O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.*