**Do we have a perspective that is out of this world?**

Mark 4:26-34 Kings 6:8-23

Many years ago, in Communist Ukraine, 6- year-old Yaroslav Chukhny set out for church at Easter carrying a basket of produce to be blessed by the village priest as was their custom.

He was sent alone as his parent feared serious reprisals if they openly expressed their faith.

Near the church, a big black car stopped and a Communist official scolded, ″Good children do not go to church.″ Chukhny dropped the basket and burst into tears. But as the car left, two old women comforted him and sent him to the priest. Good children do indeed go to church, they told him.

Now millions of Ukrainians celebrate the survival of their faith in God, and much of the credit belongs to elderly women like these ones.

*″From my earliest childhood, my grandmother taught me religion,″* says Chukhny, now a Ukrainian Catholic priest. *″It was the same for my friends. Our entire generation learned faith from old women.″*

Ukrainians in packed churches now give thanks for these grandmothers, who taught them to believe in God. These women were not recognised as influential within the society, but they were. [[1]](#footnote-1)

For Christians living under oppressive regimes, the ongoing work of God amongst them sustains them and provokes deep joy. In our free context, we sometimes seem less aware of the work of God around us.

Today we shared a story from 2 Kings which does not appear in the Lectionary. It is an amazing story, enlightening, inspiring and quite humorous. It came to mind as I read our gospel reading for this week as they both focus on the unseen workings of God in the midst of daily life.

The gospel reading reminds us of the unseen development of a seed, silently growing beneath the surface. Activity is taking place but it is hidden from view, imperceptible. Even with my meagre gardening experience, I know that some seeds will grow and others will not, despite similar watering this just happens. There is mystery in what happens in the soil. It points us to the reality that God is active in nature and beyond. It reminds us that the activity of God is often hidden from our sight and unpredictable.

The story from 2 Kings also reminds us that God is active though often in hidden and unpredictable ways. It also highlights that God can help us to see more of what God is doing. The prayer of Elisha for his servant to be able to see, really is the high point in this story. God gave the servant a whole new perspective.

The story of Elisha contains many reminders of the silent work of God. Elisha had procured the disdain of the King of Aram because of his God given prophetic insights into the King’s plans to attack Israel, which then thwarted the success of these attacks. The King saw him as a formidable foe and sent a powerful army at night to capture him.

Given the evidence of the silent working of God through Elisha, it is amusing that the King would think there would be any advantage in going up under the cover of darkness, would this really take Elisha’s God unawares?

Perception plays a strong role in this story. What did Elisha perceive? What did his servant perceive? What did the King of Aram perceive? What did the invading soldiers perceive?

Sight is a wonderful gift, but insight is often a greater gift.

The soldiers of Aram went and saw where Elisha was and returned at night in force to capture him.[[2]](#footnote-2) Elisha’s servant woke and saw they were surrounded by this powerful army and he was distressed.[[3]](#footnote-3) However Elisha saw so much more! Elisha could see that God was working. He prayed for his servant to be able to truly see, and God enabled the servant to see the celestial army surrounding them.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The invading army still lacked this insight. Elisha prayed that they would be dazzled by a great light and indeed they were.[[5]](#footnote-5) They were now unable to see clearly at all, and so Elisha instead of being led away captive by this army, led them away freely.[[6]](#footnote-6) The reversal of roles highlights the humour in the whole encounter.

Elisha then prays that their eyes would be opened, and the effects of the dazzling light vanished, and they could see clearly.[[7]](#footnote-7) Yet now they are the ones in peril and the King of Israel is keen to destroy them,[[8]](#footnote-8) but Elisha responds instead by providing a banquet for them and letting them go.[[9]](#footnote-9) It is easy to imagine their sense of humiliation as they returned to their King. However, they seemed to then gain a measure of insight in that they determined not to attempt to raid Israel anymore.

The story starkly reminds us that we follow a God who is active in our world. It is God who protected Elisha. It is God who gave Elisha the insights to completely reverse this dangerous situation. The history of God’s people is not in their own hands or the hands of other nations but in God’s hands. We have a great message of hope in the midst of challenging times. Richard Nelson has said,“*To a world terrified by the possibility of destruction, the church continues to affirm God’s power and to assert, with eyes opened by Easter’s new life, ‘Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’”[[10]](#footnote-10)*

This takes us back to our gospel reading. Jesus is illustrating what the kingdom of God is like with the story of the seed silently growing in the soil. As followers of Jesus, we are sharers in the kingdom of God. We live as people of this earth and as people living under the reign of God. We always have a different perspective to bring to whatever confronts us, but we frequently need God to open our eyes to what God is doing.

This week I learnt about the death of an elderly lady whom I have known for over 30 years. She had come to mind as I was preparing this message before I knew of her death. She had a tough life, but she approached life with confidence in God. She had an excellent ability to see the hand of God in her daily activities and encounters. She would often share, with anyone who would listen, her most recent experiences and how she saw God at work in the midst of them. God made a difference to how she saw everything.

So it is worthwhile looking at how our perspective is being influenced by our faith in God.

We are not always aware of what is really going on. It is important that we open ourselves to seeing what God is doing. We can be encouraged that God is active, that God will provide for us. That God is the source of our hope.

As we, as a church community, engage with our wider community, we need to take account of the reality that God is already working in our community. The work of God in this community needs to be done in partnership with God. We are called to work together with God, an amazing concept.

So we are challenged to approach life, looking not just at the perspective that comes naturally to us as human beings with differing skills and insights. We are called to seek out what God’s perspective may be, what God may be saying to us, what God may already be doing, what God may be calling us to. To pray that God may open our eyes, that we may really see, that we may see beyond the obvious, and even beyond the subtle, that we may see the heart of what we are encountering, that we may see where God is in what we face.

1. Summary of story from https://apnews.com/article/bd51769f50bc741600cbb313d4614955 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2 Kings 6:13-14 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 2 Kings 6:15 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 2 Kings 6:17 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 2 Kings 6:18 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 2 Kings 6:19 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 2 Kings 6:20 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 2 Kings 6:21 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 2 Kings 6:21-23 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Richard Nelson, *First and Second Kings, 1 and 2 Kings,* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1987) accessed as eBook location- 70.08% [↑](#footnote-ref-10)