

Peace wish

By [A. Katherine Grieb](#)

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*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Grieb's current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

[This week's Living by the Word column](#) focuses on the story of the healing of Naaman the Aramean, one of the most dramatic healing stories in the Bible. But here I want to blog about a small detail of that story as it relates to the other lessons.

The story ends as the prophet Elisha says to Naaman, "Go in peace," an ancient—and quite contemporary!—custom of wishing someone not only a safe journey home but also a sense of spiritual well-being and an inward quietness and freedom from worry or fear.

That "peace wish" is echoed both in Paul's letter to the Galatians (6:16) and in Luke's Gospel (10:5-6). Paul takes the pen from the amanuensis (the professional scribe who would have written his words in tiny letters to save space on expensive papyrus) and, in his own much larger letters, adds a personal word to the churches in Galatia.

Don't be deceived, he says. The people urging you to become circumcised (the sign of one committed to observance of the law) don't obey the law themselves. They are using you, boasting about the number of converts they have made. He reminds himself, "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

What matters, says Paul, is not circumcision or uncircumcision, but God's new creation in Christ! Then follows his peace wish to all (whether circumcised or not) who follow this rule: peace and mercy be upon them, that is, upon God's Israel. At the end of a deeply personal and highly emotional letter, Paul's peace wish to the Galatians would have meant a great deal to them.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus instructs the 70 disciples whom he sends ahead of him "like lambs into the midst of wolves" to travel lightly and to stay focused on their mission. Explaining their role as peacemakers and peace wishers, he says: "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to the house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person, but if not it will return to you."

Peace is an active power for healing and building relationships. What a gift it is to wish someone peace!