

Sermon Text – Sunday, July 6, 2025 – Pastor Paula Kraus

1st Reading: Luke 10:1-11, 16-20; 2nd Reading: Galatians 6:7-16
Scripture for Message: 2 Kings 5:1-14 “Everydayness”

There is one verse in this reading from 2 Kings that stands out as I read it. Verse 13 – “Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it?” Don’t we sometimes expect God to ask of us hard tasks so much so that we fail to see the simplicity of God’s healing presence in our everydayness? I mentioned this morning that there are hints of power, privilege, and concern for reputation in our scripture readings – that clearly comes out as we read about Naaman’s healing.

Here's the background to this narrative. Aram and Israel were often in conflict although they shared a cultural background and Semitic ancestry – their ancestor was the son of Noah, Shem. Their relationship was a complex one and, in this narrative, we read about the powerful commander of the army of the king of Aram. That powerful commander was Naaman, a great man who successfully gave victory to Aram – a victory over Israel’s armies. This mighty warrior, although successful, now suffered from leprosy a condition that would make him an outcast and untouchable.

The narrative turns from the powerful to the lowly, the young girl, a prisoner of war from Israel, offers advice to Naaman, “If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.” Naaman hears this servant girl and goes to his king with that information. It is a display of arrogance and privilege that we witness when we pay attention to how this plays out. The king of Aram sends a letter to the king of Israel – not the prophet. He also sends along treasure enough for one hundred people to purchase healing for his general Naaman. In the letter addressed to the king of Israel he introduces his servant Naaman as someone sent so “that you may cure him of his leprosy.” This is a letter addressed to the person with political power and I guess the king of Aram assumed the king also had the power to heal, or maybe he assumed the king of Israel had control over the prophet and would compel him to do what the king wanted. It is certainly possible that the treasure was sent to make up for the fact that Aram had just defeated Israel in battle – maybe it was a simple offering for reparations or a way to “buy” forgiveness and peace.

Regardless, who can blame the king of Israel for his reaction, thinking the letter was sent as a provocation. In an overreaction he tears his clothes. Assuming that the king of Aram is expecting him, the king of Israel, to cure a man

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of his leprosy he becomes distressed and fearful. The king of Israel is well aware he does not have the power to heal. Elisha however, a lowly prophet, does possess the power to heal and is unaffected by the presence of this “mighty warrior” with his horses and chariots. “Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.”

Elisha is so unimpressed that he sends a messenger to deal with Naaman. The messenger gives Naaman this message, “Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean.” Imagine this mighty warrior receiving the instructions to do something silly. I can hear him blustering, “I thought that for me he would surely come out and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy.” His expectation was that being the mighty warrior he was, this lowly prophet would stand in front of him and with the expected display of magic the prophet would cure his illness. I am sure the mighty warrior felt he wouldn’t have to do anything to receive this healing – he was a powerful commander, not someone to do another’s bidding. You also can see his sense of privilege because he was from Aram where the rivers of Damascus were better than all the waters of Israel. Hear the words that display his arrogance, “for me” Elisha should heal in the name of “his God” and the rivers of Naaman’s homeland were “better than” the rivers of Israel.

Get over yourself Naaman! Once more it is a lowly servant who comes to him to ask the question, “if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, ‘wash and be clean?’” Naaman hears this servant and submits. He finally takes Elisha’s instructions, humbles himself and does the silly thing. Doing that, his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean. That cleaning from the leprosy caused his restoration to the community and he was no longer outcast or untouchable.

When Naaman the Syrian came to Elisha, he brought silver, gold, and expensive presents, in vast amounts, to buy his healing. There is more to this story that we didn’t read, Elisha refused his money, refused his gifts. “Naaman, humbled by what he was powerless to buy, powerless to seize by force, rule, or plant his flag in, was humbled by the availability of the healing power of water, which is there for everyone, as true divinity always is.”¹ Naaman came to terms

¹ Rev. Nancy Rockwell – UCC Minister – Sermon titled “The Power of Water” Feb. 12, 2012

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with his own ordinariness in the Jordan river. And because of his healing, Naaman comes to believe in the One God of Israel, and he thanks Elisha for the healing. Naaman did indeed learn that there was a prophet in Israel. He learned that this prophet was not the one with political power and he learned that his riches, his horses, and his chariots meant nothing to this prophet. Maybe he didn't know who Elisha was at first, but he came to learn that power comes sometimes from where we might least expect it and that transformation comes as we humble ourselves.

So, what does this mean for contemporary living – what can we learn from this narrative? There is a message for us to not overlook the simple things and realize that magic can be found in our everydayness. It is also a message about humility and submission to God. I think Jesus' message to his disciples has the same meaning or humble submission to God – a message for us today.

Jesus sends his followers out to minister, and he tells them to “go out like lambs” to take nothing with them but to offer peace to the homes that accept them. He tells them too that if they are rejected, they should “wipe the dust off their feet in protest.” They are not to expect preferential treatment, nor should they call upon privilege in their travels. When the seventy he sent out return, they boast about their power to cure the sick and expel demons. Jesus replies – “do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” This is a message for them to remain humble and to find joy in the fact they are part of the kingdom of God because the kingdom of God has come near.

The lesson for us is humility. As Christians we desire to be more Christ-like in our living as we follow Jesus and Jesus' life exemplifies humility as he humbled himself by taking on the form of a servant and willingly submitting to the Father's will. There is much guidance from scripture related to humility. James 4:10 states, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” Humility involves acknowledging one's own limitations and shortcomings in comparison to God's power and grace. It also involves encouraging and valuing others above oneself, considering their interests before your own. Initially, there wasn't much humility within Naaman as he sought healing, he discovered that the healing wouldn't come until he was able to do something silly and humbling, until he could hear and listen to the lowest ones within his household.

We read in the Gospels repeatedly about how the ones with political power and the religious authorities often questioned Jesus on whose authority he

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healed the sick. Sometimes we ourselves refuse to listen to those who, in our minds, do not have the status or authority we think should belong to our leaders. Just as some Christian denominations are only willing to accept religious leaders or pastors who look just like them and their ancestors.

Jesus repeatedly compels us to answer the question about who has status and authority, not only in our churches but also in our political organizations and structures. Who are we giving power to and who are we refusing to acknowledge as able to carry power? When we consider our current culture, no ruler – president, prime-minister, king, or queen can, on their own, cure or stop our contemporary afflictions like hunger, poverty, violence, or discrimination which are like contemporary versions of the leprosy in our story creating outcasts in society – the real power of healing and transformation rests in ordinary people acting prophetically. The message for us is that if we are the ones in need of healing, then we must surrender to the power of God, whose presence rests within people we may deem as insignificant.²

There is an Amish Folk song with these lyrics – “’Tis the gift to be simple, ’tis the gift to be free, ’Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be, And when we find ourselves in the place just right, It will be in the valley of love and delight.” It is a gift to gain true simplicity in our lives – the uncomplicated way of following Jesus, of allowing ourselves the simplicity of the Spirit’s guidance. When we overlook the simple things, we lose the magic that can be found in our everydayness. The magic of doing silly things – like dipping seven times in the muddy river Jordan for our healing and transformation. When we fail to see everyday simplicity, we might just miss the presence of God who is everywhere in everything and daily present in our lives.

We, as a congregation and as individuals, need to pay attention to the lesson of Naaman’s healing. Naaman did not receive healing and transformation through going to those who he assumed had power. The power he paid attention to was the fleeting power given by the world – the power he needed was power from God. He did not find that power through his own influence and high-status but through the advice of lowly servants and a young slave girl, those who were of little significance to him. His healing did not come to him because of his treasure or his horses or his chariots – it did not come because of his power but

² Carol J. Dempsey. “Proper 9, 2 Kings 5:1-14: Connecting the Reading with the World.” *Connections Year C*, Vol. 3. eds. Green, Long, Powery, & Rigby. WJK. 2019. Print. 126-128

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it came because he eventually became willing to humble himself and do something silly.

A grand display of power and might has no effect in God's kingdom. It is everyday simplicity and humility that gets the attention of our God. Let us be like Paul, in his words to the Galatians that we read this morning, "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. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!" We are a new creation in Christ. So, as we humbly submit to God's will in our lives – rejoice that your names are written in heaven.