

Scripture:  
 Psalm 30  
 2 Kings 5:1-15

“Healing and wholeness.”

Today in the 2nd book of Kings we learn about the high and mighty Naaman.

Who according to the first verse of chapter 5 is ---  
 --- commander of the army of Aram  
 ----- highly regarded  
 ----- valiant and victorious soldier  
 ---- and ----- last but not least ----- and a complete shift in gears  
 ---- a leper.

“But he had leprosy.” ----- verse 1 ends.

Highly esteemed commander --- victor ----- powerful ---- mighty and  
 valiant one ---- yadda ---- yadda ----- yadda ---- “but also leper.”

And --- “but also leper” ----- was no small thing.

“But also leper” ----- in that time --- in that culture ---- basically stripped  
 him of all the accolades ---- prestige --- and reputation that he ever had.

Imagine describing someone as ---- successful --- prosperous ---  
 philanthropic ----- admired ---- and respected ----- only to conclude by  
 also saying something like --- but he is also a multiply convicted pedophile.

Sometimes the one thing that comes after the “but”----- means more -----  
 and can strip away everything else that comes before it.

That’s precisely what happened with Naaman.

What people remembered about him was that last line ---- but he had  
 leprosy.

Leprosy wasn’t just a disease ----- it went far far beyond just a physical  
 ailment.

If you had leprosy in the ancient near east --- you were not welcome among the general society --- you were an outcast --- ritually unclean --- chastised --- marginalized.

If you had leprosy --- there was something profoundly wrong with you.

That God would allow you to suffer from leprosy --- meant you were not welcome in society and you were looked down upon as dirty and having something wrong with you on a fundamental level.

Naaman is powerful in one sense ----- and at the same time very weak and vulnerable in another.

He is at once a valiant and successful warrior --- a commander --- and at the same time an outcast --- and cast off --- or at least on his way to quickly becoming so.

Naaman needs healing and wholeness quickly ----- and he knows it.

Naaman needs healing and wholeness --- but the very same healing and wholeness that he so desperately needs eludes him ---- and he knows it.

And as we see this great and powerful man ---- can do very little without the help of the lowly --- 3 lowly people actually.

A lowly slave girl --- aid to Naaman's wife.

A prophet from the enemy country of Israel ---- Elisha.

And finally personal servants who instruct Naaman to do what the Israelite prophet Elisha instructs him to do.

God so often chooses the lowly ----- and our passage from 2 Kings today serves as a prime example of this.

Lowly slave girl ---- lowly prophet from a foreign enemy land ---- and lowly servant to this great commander.

There is a great tension in this passage between who is powerful and who is not.

Who can heal and who cannot.

And Naaman quickly comes to realize that there is a power active in Israel that no political might or social prestige can contain.

And he comes to realize that that power is God.

And God's power and might is manifested in a way that Naaman can truly appreciate --- offering him the healing and wholeness he so desperately longs for.

Naaman already has everything else in life.

Power ---- prestige --- respect --- success.

He has a great job ----- is very successful at what he does --- he has the respect of many and wants for no material things.

But he soon comes to realize that what he really needs --- and what he really wants he cannot generate by himself ---- or buy from another.

After coming to the place of --- “Well nothing else has worked ---- so I might as well try what this little Israelite slave girl has proposed to my wife - -- and go to the prophet she speaks of.” ----- Naaman goes to his King and asks for a letter.

Aram was an enemy of Israel.

So if someone like Naaman --- a military commander --- tried to enter Israel he could very well expect to be attacked and met with opposition.

So the king of Aram ---- Naaman's boss ---- writes a letter to the King of Israel ----- which would ensure safe passage for Naaman.

And as verse 6 says --- the letter asks that “Naaman be cured of his leprosy.”

Now you might be asking yourself ----- “This is a little strange isn’t it?”

A King ----- asking an enemy King --- to heal his chief military commander.

And of course the answer is “Yes” --- “Yes it is a little --- if not also --- very strange.”

Why would any King --- heal the chief military commander of an enemy King?

Listen to the King of Israel’s response on receiving the letter.

Picking it up at verse 7 ---- “Am I a God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!”

The King is unsure about what is happening.

You might even say he throws a bit of a hissy fit ----- tearing his robes --- as verse 7 says.

And you can’t really blame him --- an enemy has asked him to cure his chief military commander --- is this some kind of a trick who on earth can heal someone from leprosy --- and even if you could why would you ---- he’ll only be stronger for the ext time he attacks you.

He has no idea that it is God who is orchestrating this healing and that through a lowly slave girl --- the prophet Elisha --- and one of Naaman’s personal servants ---- God’s power and influence will be manifest.

And it is precisely when the King ---- the one with the perceived power --- throws his little hissy fit of confusion that Elisha ----- a true agent of God --- - steps in and takes over.

Elisha is ---- “Lowly” helper number 2 of 3.

Slave girl to Naaman’s wife --- is lowly helper number 1 ---- she suggests that Naaman go to Israel to see the Hebrew prophet.

And now Elisha that prophet is lowly helper number 2.

And as we will soon see --- personal servant to the commander --- lowly helper number 3.

So Elisha the prophet steps in.

Verse 8 --- “When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: “Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel.”

And then verse 9 --- “So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha’s house.”

I can’t help but think that this must have been quite the scene.

Elisha likely lived in a very humble abode --- far off the beaten track ---- on the outskirts of town --- the other side of the tracks ---- among the sticks and rocks.

And in comes this army commander ---- the 5 star general if you like ----- with full military entourage in tow ---- horses --- chariots ---- servants ----- guards and so on.

Up to a shack out in the middle of nowhere.

And then once he arrives at what was likely a rather destitute spot ---- the prophet doesn’t even go out to meet him and instead sends out a servant with a message.

Verse 10 --- “Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, “Go wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.””

And then Naaman’s response ---- verse 11 ----- “But Naaman went away angry and said, “I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus,

better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage."

Naaman is frustrated by the reception he is given ----- and enraged by the instructions.

Naaman may be smart enough realize that he is at the mercy of God for his healing ----- but he still fails to surrender to God.

Naaman may realize a certain dependence on God --- but he still wants God to act and heal and greet and instruct him in a certain way --- he is after all a valiant and victorious commander.

The truth is ----- God often works through the lowly and Naaman hasn't given himself over to this --- he still wants to be treated as someone special with standing.

But God doesn't look on the outer --- what society sees --- He sees what deep within us ---- our true longings and wants and desires --- our heart.

As it was for Naaman so it is for us ----- God is at work healing --- restoring ---- making whole in ways that we don't at first suspect --- or agree with.

In Naaman's case ---- God works through lowly servants ---- foreigners --- people different from him --- and dirty water.

That taking a dip --- or 7 dips as it were ----- in dirty --- muddy water ----- water used by lowly peasants to bathe in ----- will lead to healing ----- is a surprising outbreak of God's healing power ---- and Naaman's not at all thrilled with just how God is working here.

Naaman has expectations and assumptions ---- "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy."

Naaman thinks he knows best.

Naaman assumes he knows how it will all happen.

He's so upset and disappointed that he's ready to head back home in a fit of rage.

But then in steps lowly helper number 3.

Picking it up at verse 13 ---- "Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? 'How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'!"

So Naaman listen to lowly servant number 3 --- and he goes and washes in what would have been disgusting water to him ---- especially since he would have had open leprous sores.

And of course he is healed and made whole.

Naaman almost misses out on his healing and wholeness but thankfully --- at the last minute he listens to his servants.

He almost turns around and walks away in frustration and anger --- "rage" -- ---- even as verse 12 says.

He has assumptions and expectations that almost get in the way of God coming to him and offering healing and wholeness.

And whether we realize it or not ---- we too have assumptions and expectations that can get in the way of God coming to us and sharing His great and saving love ----- his healing --- and wholeness.

We expect God to behave in certain ways and at certain times.

And if for some reason we think we're beyond this ----- we're only fooling ourselves ---- because we all do it --- in varying degrees --- we set expectations on God.

This event in the life of Naaman and Elisha invites us not only to reflect on the ways that God heals ----- and not only on the expectations that we have when God heals ----- but it also invites us to reflect on how God calls us to be agents in the healing process.

A lowly servant girl steps up --- after overhearing Naaman's wife speak about her husband's predicament.

Brave ----- she could have been told to stop eavesdropping and mind her own business.

She could have been told to get over herself --- who was she to suggest that a prophet from enemy Israel could possibly heal leprosy.

She could have been cast off for simply speaking up.

And the same could be said for Naaman's servant ---- he could have been chastised for speaking up --- Naaman is after al enraged --- it took a little bravery for the servant to speak up when he did.

And in the case of the servant girl in particular there must have been some divine direction --- she was after all an Israelite herself and it isn't long ---- the very next chapter ---- 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 6 ---- that we find Naaman's country attacking Israel once again.

Why would she heal a commander who was just about to kill her people again?

Simple ----- because God directed her.

The gospel is full of people following God's lead even when it seems a bit odd to do so.

The gospel is full of God working in mysterious ways.

When we see healings ----- sight restored ---- the lame walking again ---- the dead raised ---- the sick cured ---- the possessed freed --- and so on ---- there is often more than just physical healing going on.

To be healed by God is to be made whole.

To be healed is to be welcomed back into community.

A leper was driven away from and cast out of community.

Once a leper was healed --- which was pretty rare indeed ---- they were once again welcomed back into the community they were cast away from.

To be healed is to be welcomed back into community.

The truth is whether we realize it or not we are surrounded by God's healing moments --- and whether we realize it or not we are surrounded by God's healing agents.

And as disciples of Jesus Christ we are called to recognize these moments --- - and these actions ----- and to lead people to the healing waters of Christ.

God is all about healing and wholeness.

And as His disciples ---- as followers of Christ we are called to be too.

God desires healing and wholeness --- salvation from any and everything that ails --- hinders ---- and limits us.

Sin and shortcomings --- short sightedness --- personal agenda's --- and so on.

We are surrounded by healing moments --- and there are people to our left and to our right who can aid us in healing and moving beyond what hinders and cripples us.

We are surrounded by God's loving ----caring --- saving --- healing and wholeness making hands.

Sometimes it's human hands that can direct us to healing and wholeness ---- in this passage 3 lowly people direct Naaman to the healing waters --- and then God steps in and heals him.

If we ever think that we're trapped or crippled up by pain or past experiences ----- we're not ---- unless we choose to be ---- which is sad --- because it's only of our own choosing.

There is so much to be thankful for.

Even Naaman --- foreigner --- enemy to Israel ---- has an awakening after being healed by God.

Verse 15 --- “Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel.”

“Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel.”

That would have been a huge awakening ---- for an enemy commander to say this would have taken great courage.

And then he wants to offer a gift --- and respond in thanksgiving.

It wasn't just a healing for Naaman --- there is also wholeness.

“Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel.” --- he says on being healed and restored to community and fellowship.

We are so often surrounded by God's healing hands and movement.

Think about what happened earlier here today --- with baptism.

A washing away ----- and not just for William but for all of us.

A reminder of the abundant and free grace of God.

As disciples of Jesus Christ we are called to recognize these moments and to lead people to the healing waters of Christ.

We are surrounded by God's loving ----caring --- saving --- healing and wholeness making hands.

God is doing amazing and wonderful and powerful things among us --- in the world.

There is no reason to feel anything but elation and celebration ----- and joy and thanksgiving.

May we celebrate God's goodness --- His healing and His bringing to wholeness.

And may we start today.

Amen.