



## **“Do Something Difficult?”**

Preaching Text: 2 Kings 5:1-14  
7 July 2013: 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Communion Sunday  
FUMC of Arlington, Texas 76011

Hear the day’s lesson:

1 Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. 2 Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman’s wife. 3 She said to her mistress, “If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.”

4 So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. 5 And the king of Aram said, “Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel.” He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. 6 He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, “When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy.” 7 When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, “Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me.”

8 But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, “Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.” 9 So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha’s house. 10 Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, “Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.” 11 But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, “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! 12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?” He turned and went away in a rage.

13 But his servants approached and said to him, “Father, 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?’” 14 So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean (2 Kings 5:1-14).

“Leprosy”, a Hebrew word for a number of skin diseases, some incurable.

“Leprosy” may or may not speak precisely to Hansen’s Disease—that which we normally think of when we think of leprosy. In biblical times people often isolated sufferers, but only in advanced stages of their affliction. As Naaman is so afflicted, he



goes to his king with a tale from a captive Israelite chamber maid who told of a great healing prophet in her land.

So . . . two kings, a prophet, and some bit players get involved in the healing of a truly powerful man. Naaman brings the commonly expected honorarium of great value. But when Naaman gets to Elisha's house, the prophet does not bother even to greet the mighty military leader. Instead Elisha instructs Naaman via intercessors to wash entirely—that is “seven times”—in the Jordan. But Elisha's remedy seems far too simple for Naaman, so in a snit he nearly rejects doing what he is instructed. After all, are not the rivers near Damascus, “Abana” and “Pharpar,” better than in Israel? Still Naaman yields to his servant's counsel, just as his wife had listened to the young servant girl.

I would like to “laundry list” several items in this nearly three thousand year old text summons. **First when people are really hurting, we will go anywhere for help**—and I do mean anywhere. Naaman's mention of the rivers in Syria is a sneering and mocking suggestion that Syria is superior to Israel—and yet in his deep desire to be healed Naaman is willing to submit to a river in Israel. One question we might ask ourselves is: “What rivers are we willing to cross to be healed (the Mississippi, Red, Rio Grande, or Colorado Rivers)?”

**Second when people are really hurting, we will listen to anyone who seems to have a good idea/suggestion.** To Naaman's credit, via his wife, he took to heart a young slave girl's suggestion. Not only that, even after he scoffed at Elisha's instructions, his servants plead a reasonable claim: “if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it?” So, Naaman ends up listening to the counsel of several persons that previously he would not have considered for an instant. Yet when a person is really hurting, then . . . . “We listen to some weird dudes,” as one of my friends regularly says.

**Third when people are really hurting then we will even do what God asks**



**us to do.** Naaman is told to wash in the Jordan seven times. Why that number? We don't know, but the story tells us it worked! And old Naaman is surprised, but also pleased—and healed of his affliction.

Curiously, the Greek word for salvation, *soteria*, signifies complete, whole, in harmony, or peace. Its counterpart word in Hebrew is *shalom*. Suitably then, in our Christian tradition salvation concerns not only what the Greeks call the soul, but also the whole person. In the Genesis creation story God blows into “the adam’s” nostrils the breath of life— and he becomes a living being—a soul—a living *nephesh* (Genesis 2:7).

In being released from the affliction of leprosy by the God of Elisha and all Israel, Naaman is healed in body, but perhaps even more. In willingly listening to others, Naaman is healed in body ***and*** spirit. After the end of our lesson, the story tells us that Naaman returns to Elisha, saying “I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel.”

Can you imagine? Even Israel's enemies receive healing grace from God.

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