

2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c; Psalm 111; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17:11-19

Grace to you and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

We have this great story from the Old Testament tonight, although in an abbreviated version. So I am going to fill in the missing parts and talk about it a bit. Two countries: Aram, which we would know as modern day Syria; and Israel. Each of them are ruled by kings and each of them have their corresponding armies. In Aram (or Syria), there is this general and his name is Naaman. Now Naaman has some kind of skin disease. Our scripture calls it leprosy, but what we need to remember is that in scripture, any kind of skin disease is called leprosy. They don't mean just Hansen's Disease, where your nerves die and your digits rot off and we have leper colonies. Hansen's Disease is what we know as leprosy. In scripture any kind of skin disease is known as leprosy. It could be psoriasis; it could be a really bad case of acne; it could be a really large birthmark; or it could also be Hansen's Disease. One could even be an Albino. Any of those would be considered leprosy. Some disease or other had struck Naaman (you have to read through to the end of the story to find out that we think Naaman was probably an albino). But still Naaman is considered a leper.

In his household Naaman has a servant girl (otherwise called "slave"), that he captured from Israel. This young girl is apparently well treated there, because she very graciously says to her mistress one day, "I wish that my master Naaman was over in Israel because there is a holy man in Israel who could cure him." Mrs. Naaman tells it to her husband. Naaman goes to his king, the person in all of the land that he is second to. He goes to the king and he says to the king that there is this holy man in Israel who can supposedly cure him. So the king of Aram writes a letter to the king of Israel. Now this is the part that was edited out, and the letter basically says: Dear King of Israel, To you, I am sending my servant Naaman; cure him." Now interestingly he doesn't send it to the holy man, he sends it to the king of Israel. But he sends Naaman along with donkey loads of clothing, donkey loads of money and oils. Naaman show up at the king of Israel's court. The King doesn't know what to do, he tears out his hair, he rips his clothes, "Who am I, God, that I can cure this man?"

The holy man of Israel, his name was Elisha, heard about the problems that the king of Israel was going through. He sent word to the king and said "don't worry, I can do this. Send him to me." And so the king of Israel does that. He sends Naaman and his entire entourage to go to Elisah. Now to me the interesting thing here is that Elisha, if you are paying attention, doesn't go out to meet Naaman. Not only does he not go out to meet Naaman: he tells him to go and wash in the river. Now if Colin Powell showed up at your house, you would probably not get the neighbor kid to go out and to greet Colin Powell with a gift certificate to Starbucks. But that's kind of what happened here. The second most powerful man in the entire neighboring country shows up at Elisah's door, and Elisha basically blows him off.

Well this as you might guess annoys Naaman to the n-th degree. And he storms off, “ah he doesn’t even come out to greet me, I thought he was going to come out and greet me, wave his hand over me and I would be cured. The least he could do is send me off on some mighty mission.” He’s off ranting and raging, grumbling under his breath, “what do you mean I have to go wash in these local rivers. Why do I have to go all the way to the Mississippi River, what’s wrong with the Susquehanna, it’s even high right now, I can take a nice dip. Why do I have to go so far away to do this.” One of Naaman’s servants calms him down. The man probably in modern day would have a degree in psychology. He’s able to calm Naaman down. “Master, if he would have sent you out in a hard and difficult mission, wouldn’t you have gone?” “Well sure I would have gone.” “All he is asking you to do is go down to the river. It ‘s a hot day. Wouldn’t it be nice to go into the river, cool off, just sit there a little bit. That is all he is asking you to do.” You can almost hear the calm, soothing voice of his servant as he talks to Naaman. Naaman finally, and I am guessing begrudgingly, goes down to the shore, goes into the river the seven times as Elisha directed him, and his leprosy is gone. This man who has had to be apart from society all of his life due to his illness, and yet still rose to the rank of general, this man is now made whole. And he is thankful beyond anything that he can comprehend.

He returns to Elisha and he tries to thank Elisha by presenting him with gifts, but Elisha doesn’t want any of the gifts. And Naaman is so thankful, he has this incredibly radical change of heart and mind, because he becomes a worshiper of the God of Israel. He goes from being a polytheistic - man to one who worships many and various gods - to proclaiming there is only one God in all the world, and that God is the Lord God. His healing has been complete; not just the physical transformation of his body, but the spiritual healing of his heart. He has suddenly come to this new and radical understanding of who the Lord is, simply by being obedient in faith.

In a few minutes we’re going to see some obedience in faith. We will see that obedience as Tim and Dawn bring TJ forward and we pour the water and we say the words. They are being obedient to the faith in which they were raised, and to the faith in which they are raising Cassidy and Tabatha, and the faith in which they are promising they are going to raise TJ. But as it was not the water that cleansed Naaman, and it is not the water that is going to save TJ. For Naaman, it was his obedience to faith in his healing, that he is transformed and he begins his new life. TJ won’t be saved by the water or the power of the candle or by any smell that this oil on his forehead or anything that I am doing. He is saved rather by the gathering together of the people of God, he is saved by the cross that Jesus died upon and it is in the presence of the Spirit in the water. We, as we worship in our Lutheran tradition, say that the Spirit is in with and under the water. The water will become infused with the Spirit, and as we pour the water over TJ’s head, he too will become infused with the Spirit and go forth filled.

The water is not magic; the candle and the oil are not magic. It is the faith that heals him, that makes him whole, the gift of faith that God gives to us that is then imparted to TJ. **That** is what saves, that is what he will take with him as he leaves here tonight. He can’t really understand the promises that Tim and Dawn are making on his behalf. But they **do** promise that they will raise him in the faith so that when he is old enough to understand that he will be given the

instruction so that he can understand. They will raise him so that as he grows and learns he can claim this faith for his own. So that TJ, like Naaman, so like the lepers in our gospel reading as well, they, too, *together* will take this faith and make it active in their lives. They'll make it active in his life and may we all of us take that faith and make it active in our own life. AMEN