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

This has been a wet week. I spoke with one person who said he had two hundred gallons of rain water in his basement. Another person told me she spent Friday evening with the wet-vac in her basement. I’ve heard reports of people getting their basements pumped out with industrial equipment. Marianne posted videos on Facebook from all the water rushing through Camp Nawakwa, by Arendtsville. We even had some workers here at Trinity who had to leave Friday afternoon because a retention pond next to their building in Dillsburg was overflowing, and they had to go evacuate people and equipment.

Water, water, everywhere. None of that water, though, was anything we would want to wash in, or drink, or clean with, or cook with. Yet we need water. We need water to survive. The human body can go for about three weeks without food, but we cannot last more than three days without water.

Water played an important role in our first reading. Naaman, commander of the Aramean army, has leprosy. At least, that is what scripture calls it. In that day and age, any type of skin affliction was labeled “leprosy.” It could mean what we know as Hansen’s disease, which is where nerves die, tissue becomes infected, and people often lose digits or limbs. But it could also mean someone suffering from eczema; someone with a prominent birth mark; an albino; even a person with really bad acne. Usually someone with leprosy, like in our New Testament reading, is forced to live apart from the community as a whole. That is not the case with Naaman, so we can suppose that probably he does not have Hansen’s disease, but rather one of those other forms.

Regardless, Naaman is afflicted. His wife’s serving girl, a captured Israelite, makes a comment about the healing abilities of a prophet back in her home town. In the part of our story that was left out of our reading, Naaman approaches his own king to ask permission to go to Israel to seek out this healer. The king of Aram writes a letter to the king of Israel (at this point, a vassal state of Aram) and demand that Naaman be cured. Which is why, then, that the Israeli king reacts the way he does. The healer, a prophet named Elisha, gets wind of what is going on, and sends word to the Israelite king, saying to send the military leader to him. Rather like water meandering down a hillside, Naaman is finally on his way to the right place.
We don’t know what Naaman was expecting when he reaches Elisha’s home, but Elisha sends out a servant with instructions:
"Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." (V10)
I do not know how clean the Jordan was at that point in history, how pristine or how polluted. All we do know is Naaman’s reaction, which is, shall we say, less than favorable. Admittedly, from his point of view, Naaman is a guy more accustomed to having the orders flow from him, to having people come to him for instruction. He is used to being the important one, the BMOB: Big Man On Battlefield. Elisha insults him, first by sending a servant and not coming himself to such an obviously important man; and then Elisha has him wash in what is to Naaman a stinking drainage ditch.

Fortunately, cooler heads prevail:
"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'?” (V13)
Naaman gives in and does so; he is indeed healed; and he returns to Elisha, humbled, and gives thanks. An outsider, an enemy of the state, is healed by the One True God.

In our gospel reading, we have a similar story: ten lepers approach Jesus upon his entry into a village. They know they law; they keep their distance. They cry out “Have mercy on us!” What do they mean by that? It could mean they want food, or alms. It could mean they simply want someone to treat them humanely. We really do not know from the reading if they, like Naaman, were asking to be healed. Still, like Elisha, Jesus sends them on their way with a task: "Go and show yourselves to the priests." (V14)
On their way, they become clean.

Again, we do not know what the other nine did with any certainty. Perhaps they continued on their way to the temple to be officially declared clean. Perhaps they simply realized their good fortune, and headed to wherever home might have been. All we truly know is that only one of the ten returned to seek out Jesus. Upon finding Jesus, he humbles himself by throwing himself onto the ground and thanking Jesus. And like Naaman, this man, a Samaritan - Samaritans, who are despised by the people of Israel; a Samaritan, who we do not know if the others in the group, presumably Jews, were even pleasant to him - yet it was this Samaritan that the Lord God chose to heal, and like the outsider Naaman, this outcast Samaritan was the one who returned to humbly thank the healer.

How like our two lepers do we often find ourselves? Are we like Naaman before he was made whole: knowing we are imperfect, yet demanding that others treat us with respect? Requiring obedience from all, even those who are not under our direct authority? What road with that type of behavior lead us down?
Are we like the Samaritan leper, before he was healed: simply striving to survive in a world that is hostile to us, finding refuge with others that are like us regardless if they actually “like” us; going wherever the road takes us?

Or are we living like ones who have been healed: humble; thankful; knowing God’s grace firsthand, and willing to share that love and grace and forgiveness with those around us, regardless if they, too, are living unhealed lives, boldly marching down roads that take them further away from God, or if they are living lives of wholeness regardless of the condition of their bodies, seeking to walk that road that God is guiding us on?

Sometimes, our lives seem like water flowing down a hill. It rushes along, pushing everything out of its way. It can be life giving, but too often, without guidance, it can be just as destructive. It’s up to us to figure out which way we want to go: do we live for ourselves, commanding, demanding, expecting our desires to be met? Or do we live in humble service to God?

Oh! Part of the story of Naaman I forgot to tell you, that was not part of our reading: so when Naaman returns to Elisha, and humbly thanks him, he then proclaims his devotion to the Lord God, and also says

18 But may the LORD pardon your servant on one count: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow down in the house of Rimmon, when I do bow down in the house of Rimmon, may the LORD pardon your servant on this one count." (2Ki 5:18 NRSV)

To which Elisha replies
"Go in peace."

All that is to say, God knows we are going to mess up. We won’t get things right. That does not mean, however, that we do not try.

Water rushing along is always going to take the path of least resistance. God, on the other hand, shows us the right way. God’s way is not always the way of least resistance. But that’s okay, because God walks along with us showing us the path, offering aid, picking us up when we fall.

God’s way is the right way.

Amen.

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