

Pentecost 4 Lectionary 14 - Sunday, July 3, 2022

2 Kings 5:1-14

Rev. Paul Sartison

Did you notice how simple it is? Naaman was his name, and as you heard he was a commander in the king's army...the king of what today is Syria. Naaman was successful and powerful, he'd led his army to great victories and raided the neighbours – even the neighbour named Israel. He's a great warrior, but he's also afflicted by some skin disease, and he ends up in enemy territory looking to be healed by a holy man named Elisha. And Elisha just says, "Go wash in the Jordan River seven times and you'll be OK – healed and clean."

That's it. Naaman is powerful and experienced and strong and important. He's brought unimaginable amounts of money and gifts to buy his health, but all he gets is "Go take a bath in the river." He wants to be the centre of attention, he wants a spectacle, he wants this holy man named Elisha to come out and greet him and call out and wave his arms over him, like a preacher on TV (not like a preacher in Fort Richmond. Sorry). He's used to getting what he wants. But all he gets from Elisha is "Go take a bath in our holy river," and Naaman says "There's no way I'm doing that. But his slaves convince him to give it a try. So he splashes water from the Jordan over himself seven times and he's OK again. He's healed.

I've always been struck by how simple it is. When Naaman encountered the God who calls us together here today, he didn't need all that money he brought along; he could have travelled light and left it at home. He didn't need to do anything much, there wasn't even a liturgy or a hymn of the day or a creed to confess. He didn't have to do anything complicated. The word was just, "Go take a bath in that river."

And he was healed.

Then he went back home, but with a new trust in this God who had healed him. And he probably went back to his job of being a commander in the King's army, an army that still fought against Israel, whose God had restored Naaman's health. But Naaman will always carry around that memory and that experience of being changed and healed and made new just by trusting that word, and splashing around in the water. Wherever he goes now, he will be unable to push aside the presence of that God who refreshed him that day and made him whole. And none of it happened because of his money or his power or his plans or procedures. It was all about trusting the one who said, "Just go to the water." And then he began to trust the God who healed through that water.

There's something sort of baptismal in that story, even though baptism as we know it and practice it didn't come along until hundreds of years after this story was first told and a thousand and more years after this story of Naaman is set. But I know that my life gets too complicated sometimes, and there can be fear, and those nasty voices inside.... And sometimes I get stuck thinking that it's my hard work that will get me through whatever's going on in my life. But again and again I've had a Naaman kind of moment where my degrees or smart ideas or busy schedule just can't cut it. And I've remembered that I've been to the water where God said, "I love you and always will. You belong and you always will. Your life is new and you don't need to be more than you are." And when I remember that I've been to the water I'm free...at least for a few minutes or maybe a day or two until I need to go to the water and remember again – remember again that I don't need degrees or smart ideas or solutions or successes. It's just the water.

And that's enough. That's where God met me and promised all the life I could ever need.

It's the same water for all of you, and the same water that we've all been bathing in for our lifetimes and thousands of lifetimes, all the way back to the lifetime of an Aramean general named Naaman, and back even more. And the memory of that water is a strong gift to carry around.

Just go to the water.

Give it a try. Remember. When the fears or the worries or the anger about injustices all around are, well, paralyzing; or when your own voices on the inside or the voices on the outside say things that hurt, or tell you that you don't matter, remember that you've been to the water; to the water where God said "You are loved and you belong. As you are. Now. You don't need to bring anything or be anything more." That's the gift of the God who meets us in baptismal waters and meets us every day. Just go to the water. Forget about the money or the plans or the success or failure. It's a promise for you, for me, for us, for Epiphany, as we head into whatever comes next. Just go to the water, where you taste again that you are free....that we are free. Then go about your work, and your caring for the world, and your speaking and acting and loving your neighbour. And remember the water, where God gave us all everything that we need. Already.

There's one more little something about this story...and it's really not just a little something. There are a few other really important people. Not Naaman's king or boss, not the king of Israel. Sure they're in the story, but they're small potatoes, really.

The other really big figures in the story are, first, a young girl who serves Naaman's wife. She was picked up by the army when they went on a raid across the border into Israel. There's no reason to assume that women and girls picked up on military raids then would have been treated any differently than they are now. But this servant girl, this slave girl, says that she knows a healer back home who could help Naaman. Maybe she's being helpful, maybe she's being spunky and tough – "Hah! If you were in my country someone could help you. Not like here." Whatever she's getting at, she speaks and her voice is heard. She might be treated like she's just a slave. But she speaks. And Naaman listens to the slave. Maybe that's the miracle. The one with all the power actually listens to someone who might usually not be heard. And even before that, the servant girl – I wish they told us her name - she has the courage to speak. And because she speaks borders are crossed, and for a moment enemies mix and mingle and give and receive from each other.

She speaks – just go to the water.

And there are some other slaves as well. When Naaman flies into a rage because his money and his status and power aren't even noticed...all he needs is some water...he wants to go back home. But his own slaves say, "You know, you'd try something complicated if you were told to do something complicated. But Elisha just told you to go to the water. Why not just go to the water?" And the miracle occurs again: Naaman listens to the slaves. And even before that they were strong to stand up to the great commander and talk some sense into him.

The miracle might just be that someone listens to the ones who wouldn't be heard. And this servant girl who told Naaman where he could find healing, and

these servants or slaves who talk him into taking his bath in the Jordan? Their words point a general to healing waters that he doesn't need to buy, and their words move enemies into each others' territory, not for war but for healing; and enemies trust each other for a time, and enemies give and receive what they need to live.

A question: Who are the voices that we maybe don't hear? Maybe we could learn to listen closely, and maybe we could not be afraid of voices we don't take the time to hear or would rather not hear. Who knows? Those are the voices that might point us to healing and to new life. It happened to Naaman. It could happen....

Or another question: Is yours one of those voices? Maybe you've felt silent but maybe you know something that we need to hear, maybe you have a way to tell us to go to the water, to go where we'll be healed; maybe you have a way to remind us that we've got everything we need; we don't need to be afraid, we don't need to bring anything...just go to the water. Does your voice need to be heard? A young woman spoke, some servant boys spoke...and someone found healing waters. It could happen.

Just go to the water. You belong. You're loved. We've been to the water, and it overflows. It's more than enough.

AMEN.