

Eighteenth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/C): Naaman, Keith and Jayce David  
2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c; Luke 17:11-19  
October 12-13, 2019  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

I didn't hear anyone laughing while the 1<sup>st</sup> lesson from 2 Kings was read, but there **is** some humor there. We've got 2 **powerful** men, a general from Syria and the king of Israel, both feeling **powerless**, threatened, and sounding like they're on their last nerve. Naaman is the general. God has handed him a big victory in battle, over Israel, no less, so he's sitting pretty with his king; he's in his boss's good graces. But he has a problem, a medical problem. He's got some skin disease that falls under the umbrella of leprosy. In Bible times "leprosy" described a lot of skin problems, ranging from psoriasis, uncomfortable and unsightly, to Hansen's Disease, which could make your fingers and toes fall off and kill you. The lepers who meet Jesus outside the village limits in Luke's Gospel have the terrible kind of leprosy that is so contagious and was so feared that its victims were thrown out of society, had to wear bells to warn healthy people to keep their distance, and were left to live in caves and beg for food. Naaman had some milder form of skin disorder that caused him suffering but still allowed him to live with his family and command an army.

Just like God had a loving plan in Keith being baptized this Saturday evening along with Jayce David, his & Sue's grandson, Kelli & John's son, God had a plan in Naaman defeating Israel in battle and capturing a young slave girl whom he gave to his wife. We don't know that child's name, but we do know she had a good heart and a plucky personality. She sees immediately that her mistress's husband suffers from a nasty skin affliction and she wishes out loud that he could connect with the prophet from her homeland through whom the Lord has performed miracles, including raising the dead son

of a widow (the Shunammite woman – cf. 2 Kings 4). That thinking-out-loud sets the ball rolling for the rest of the story. In desperation, in hope, in a combination of both, Naaman decides to check out that possibility of healing.

The king of Syria wants Naaman, his successful general, to be healthy and happy, so he orders a lot of money and some lovely clothes to be gathered and sent to the king of Israel, along with a letter from himself. The contents of the letter was deleted from the lesson we heard, but part of it reads:

*“When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy.”* (2 Kings 5:6b)

And the king of Israel thinks, “Drat! I’m not able to cure him of anything! And the king of Syria probably knows that and is going to use my failure as a reason to attack us again and conquer us completely this time!” He’s a melodramatic kind of guy and tears his robe as he laments and whines:

*“Am I God, to give death or life....? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me.”* (2 Kings 5:7)

Of course, the letter should’ve been addressed to the prophet Elisha and not the king of Israel. I guess either the king of Syria wasn’t a very good listener or the advice of the little slave girl got muddled as it moved through the grapevine. But word reaches Elisha and he suggests to the king that he send Naaman his way. Once the general arrives at his gate, he sends a messenger with a prescription for health: bathe in the Jordan River 7 times. And Naaman thinks and says: “Are you kiddin’ me?? #1, why didn’t the prophet come out here and tell me that himself, and #2, we have beautiful rivers in Syria. I didn’t come all this way to take a dip in the second-rate Jordan.”

The proud peacock has to learn some humility. To his credit, and by God's grace, Naaman does listen to his brave servants who go out on a limb and risk his anger by pointing out: he would've been willing to do something much harder, so why not do what's easy? "Wash, and be clean." (2 Kings 5:13c) And Naaman does and he's cured. Not just made physically whole, but spiritually, too: "*Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel.*" (2 Kings 5:15c) Sorta like our Lord Jesus says to the grateful leper in the Gospel, who is not only healed but also saved: "*Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.*" (Luke 17:19)

Naaman was commanded to do what may have sounded and looked silly: bob up and down 7 times in the river. He resisted, then he obeyed, and then he was delivered from his sickness. In Holy Baptism we are washed 3 times with water and the Word: Keith, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Jayce David, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We do this in obedience to our Lord Jesus' command in Matthew 28:19:

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...."*

We also bless the bread and wine of Holy Communion in obedience to our Lord's command, "*Do this in remembrance of me.*"

From the outside looking in, how could 3 splashes of water and a few words, a nibble of Bread and a sip of Wine, possibly confer **life, forgiveness** and **salvation**?? I can't explain that any more than I can account for why Naaman's washing in the Jordan swept away his leprosy or how Jesus healed those ten lepers as they obediently went on their way to show themselves to the priests. I **do** believe, though, that obedience to God's Word opens the door to miracles in our lives. I also believe that there is a mystical change within

us when we die and rise with Christ in the waters of Baptism and when we receive the Lord's Supper. We become more than we were.

It's all about our sin and God's forgiveness. Most of us grew up learning that original sin is washed away in the waters of Baptism. We don't believe that Baby Jayce David has sinned, but we do believe that there is something in our humanity that has to be redeemed, some genetic penchant for self-serving behavior, an overriding ability to "miss the mark" of virtue and hurt ourselves and others. Our Savior took **all** our failures in love to the cross, redeemed the awful consequences of our sin, and won forgiveness for us. That's a gift we receive first in Holy Baptism, then over and over again, every time we receive Holy Communion: **forgiveness of sins, life and salvation**: a clean slate, healing of soul-hurt, sometimes healing of physical ills as well.

**Grace**: God's love that comes to us as gift and not as a reward. In Holy Baptism God's love bathes us as surely as the water does. In Holy Communion God's love nourishes us as surely as the Bread & Wine. In these holy Sacraments God embraces us all, but especially Keith and Jayce this evening. Welcome formally into the family of faith! Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham