

November 6, 2022: THIS DAY'S SERMON – Healing of Namaan

Readings: 2 Kings 5:1-15a; Matthew 8:2-3

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Let us pray: *Gracious and healing God, pour your message of hope over us today. Humble us in our opinions of self, that our stories might bring the power of your healing love to light. Speak to us, Lord, that we might be empowered to speak of you to the world. In Jesus' name, amen.*

In the story of a mighty warrior, we find both humility and hope. We are humbled with the reminder that there is no level of status nor worldly power that can prevent us from being susceptible to the illness and disease of earthly life. We are made hopeful by the truth that there are no earthly boundaries capable of keeping out the power of God's healing love.

Through the story of Namaan, it is revealed that God's desire for intimate relationship with humanity is not dependent upon status in society, religious understanding, or physical prowess. Intimate relationship with God requires a willingness to humble ourselves; to be emptied of "self" in order that the healing waters of God's love might pour over us, bringing restoration, renewal ... life.

Ironically, it is not the powerful of this morning's story who open the way for God's healing power to restore; it is the vulnerable, the powerless, the alien in the land. This morning's story is a reflection of God's care for humanity, regardless of our status.

It is also a reflection of the healing power our personal experiences of God have, when shared with another. This morning's scripture is a case in point: From a position of captivity, a young girl, stolen from her family, living in slavery, reaches out to carry the witness of God's power to her captor in order to make healing possible.

This nameless girl is an example of faith active in love, in spite of her circumstances. Her witness to her understanding of God's power to heal through the Prophet Elisha speaks of an honest form of faith, because it appears to be done without any thought of personal gain.

This powerless girl, unlike the king of Israel who sits enthroned in power, has no fear or doubt in trusting that God's Prophet can heal her captor. When the King receives the letter from the King of Aram, he immediately looks to himself and reacts in fear, even to the point of asking "Am I God, with the power to give life or death?"

It is so easy to condemn the king for his lack of faith; but, truthfully, how often is not our first reaction to an overwhelming situation that of helplessness and fear? In a culture of "self-made" people, we are taught to rely on

ourselves, rather than trusting in the God who is always present, powerful, generous and forgiving.

The reality is, not one of us is truly "self-made". We are the product of everything that has been given to us and our response to all that life has brought our way. Granted, we can elevate ourselves through hard work, determination and perseverance, but the truth is, there is not any of us who had anything to say about our starting point.

To quote an Irish Catholic preacher I once heard speak, "If you are proud of who you are because of your race, your face or your place, you had better think again because you had nothing to do with any of those things." And we cannot buy our way into any of them. The same is true for the generosity of God that pours over Namaan this morning.

While the king of Aram thought the healing of his army commander could be bought through wealth, position, power – even intimidation – the Prophet Elisha demonstrates otherwise.

Much like the young slave girl, Elisha knows – and trusts – the power of God to heal. Elisha also demonstrates that God's healing knows no boundaries, is not based on worldly status or ability to pay, and it often comes in ways that do not fit our ideas of what it should look like.

Namaan nearly blows his chance. Caught up in arrogance and pride, he expects that his position will earn him an extraordinary display of healing. Namaan is still relying on his sense of "self"; what he can do because of who society has been telling him he is. Once again, it is the people without power, his servants, who bring him to his senses. Whether it is through the appeal of his servants to humility, or a sense of desperation, Namaan submits. He gives himself fully – immerses himself – in the healing waters of God. And he is made clean. He is restored.

In the end, the girl who seemingly lacked power reveals the power of God she carries every day ... that power is called faith.

I am thankful that we are lovingly created – and re-created – by a God who is willing to look past our stubbornness and pride and arrogance in order to restore us. I am grateful for each of you and the stories you share that remind us that God works in mysterious ways to bring unexpected healing and restoration.

Can you think of a time when that has happened to you?

When you have been healed, unexpectedly; maybe even in a place you did not realize needed healing? I experienced that a few days ago.

On October 27, the judge I worked alongside for 30 years wrote to tell me that his son, Eric, had died the day before in a motorcycle accident. This is the man who had been at my side as I went through the process of grieving Jeff's death. A man who was compassionate and caring and honest in his understanding that, while he could not rid me of my grief, he could humble his heart to break with mine.

One of the joys of small town life in southwest Minnesota is the depth of community that exists in our relationships, both personal and professional. Knowing that there are people who would care to know this news, I reached out to a couple of attorneys so that they might make our tight-knit legal community aware of the judge's loss.

Truth be told, my move from the world of the courts to the world of ministry had disrupted these relationships. Treasured friendships have suffered as I have moved into a life that feels very disconnected from the one I had for 30 years. Through the sharing of this tragic news, God has unexpectedly brought restoration that has rarely been thought of, but has been unknowingly been held in a place where dreams live.

One of these attorneys, Lynn, reached out in response. In reality, Lynn was more than just a work colleague to me. She was a close and trusted friend; a person who walked by my side on my journey to this place; who shared my enthusiasm for faith and awe in God.

She was the one who heard God's dream echoed through my words as we sat in my office in the courthouse in Slayton. She was the one who listened – who heard me – when I dreamt aloud how amazing it would be to talk about faith as a job; as a career; an occupation ... a calling.

As it turns out ... or as God would have it ... Lynn's son lives in Littleton, Colorado. She is coming here for Thanksgiving and we are going to get together while she's here. It has been more than ten years since I have seen her. In response to my reflection of awe that God could use the judge's tragedy as a means to bringing us back together, Lynn commented that she has just said the same thing in a text to her son, Brady. God does, indeed, work in mysterious ways.

In the midst of our shared need for healing, from the ashes of death, God raises new life. In the midst of a horrific pandemic, God restored the ability of Molly and me to continue our faith journey. Through our shared need to worship together, and the power of Zoom, we are able to maintain contact with those who have left us or are unable to be with us for other reasons. Through a shared global disease, our little Food Shelf has opened us up to witness and respond to the needs of our community and has made it possible for others to join us in that response.

In the Christ who is eternal, our relationships are made eternal. This morning, I am humbled by the Christ who brings us to this All Saints Sunday – a day when we remember and honor those who live in the eternity of new life because of the Jesus who was willing to both immerse himself in the waters of God's baptism and submit himself to the brutality of human existence.

In this world where life is hard and the times are frightening, God calls us to remember the One who remains ever present and ever ready to heal our every ill, every fear, every sorrow. May we trust in that God and may our faith be active in love, humbling us to reach across earthly boundaries, allowing divisions to be erased, so that we might, instead, be empowered to care for and encourage healing of each other.

In Jesus' name, Amen.