

Power and Healing
Sermon for 7-4-10
Scripture: 2 Kings 5: 1-16; Psalm 30

Today's Bible story is about Naaman, a famous military commander in the land of Aram, modern day Syria. Aram is mentioned several times in the Hebrew Bible, usually in the fashion of being a thorn in the side of Israel. They fought several wars; however, in today's scripture in the 9th century before Jesus was born, they were momentarily at peace.

Let me tell you about Naaman. He was a very popular military leader, much admired by the king. He was very powerful, the king's star general, both impressive and scary. He had money and fame and a nice house, a wife and even some slave girls captured in the last war with Israel. Life was good! Or was it? Naaman was even admired by his enemies as a great man, think Colin Powell only with one important difference—he did not photograph well. In spite of all his power, his winning record, the admiration of the crowds, when he came home at night, went into his bedroom and took off his fancy uniform, he was just one more leper, one more person that others were afraid to touch, one more person worrying about being rejected because of this skin disease. Naaman was one more person that was hurting and powerless in the face of his illness, one more person in need of healing.

In this world we have the rich and powerful, and we have the invisible, little people. One of these little people in Naaman's world was

the Jewish slave girl who worked in his household. She came from Israel and was familiar with the prophet Elisha who had the power to heal. She did not speak about this directly to Naaman—that would have been much too scary; however, she told Naaman’s wife about Elisha: “If only my lord was with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his skin disease.”

In many ways this was a preposterous idea. Naaman had been treated by the king’s physicians. Was he now supposed to go looking for some faith healer? Do you know anyone who was told his illness was hopeless, that there was nothing else to do? Maybe you have been in that situation. Once you ran out of respectable doctors, done all they said to do and were still pronounced beyond cure, maybe you too would run down to Mexico to see a doctor whose degree was in veterinary medicine and had discovered a medicine that works wonders on humans. If you really want to get well, you will do anything and everything.

As soon as Naaman’s wife told him about the prophet in Israel, he went straight to the King and got permission for the visit. He had no understanding of how much it would cost so he emptied his bank account and had 750 pounds of silver and 150 pounds of gold plus other resources. A cure would be worth everything he had.

From the scripture we know that Naaman was eventually directed to the home of Elisha. A messenger was sent out to instruct him, “Go, wash in the Jordan seven times and your flesh shall be restored and you will be

clean." Naaman is wondering: "What's all this? Where is Elisha? Doesn't he know I'm a famous general and he hasn't even come out of the house to greet me?" So the scriptures tell us that Naaman was furious. He was jumping up and down mad! He had expected some grand gesture where he would be cured instantly in a spectacle that would never be forgotten. Instead he was being sent away by a messenger to go bathe in some muddy river, no way near as good a river as the ones near his home. It was too much. This river was so shallow it would only come up to his knees. He was supposed to take off his clothes in front of his men and take the world's longest bath. Oh, he was really angry, yet he was really suffering, and he really wanted to be healed. Can you feel the tension? With the encouragement of his men, he decided to enter the river, this smelly, slimy river. He went down on his knees and sank down for the first time. He focused on the number of times he went into the water; he didn't dare look at his skin. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and finally 7. By now he was winded, and I'm sure a little scared, wondering if the prescription had worked. Finally he looks and his skin was clear and clean, like a 5 year old. Can you imagine how he felt? The words are hard to find that told how grateful he was. He tried to pay Elisha but Elisha said is money was no good with God. God works for free. All he had to do was follow the directions and let go of his attitude that he was so important that he could get anything he needed. "Then God did for him what military victories and kings and

bags of money could never do. God restored his flesh, God created him all over again, and he was made new!" (Barbara Brown Taylor)

The healing of Naaman in this muddy little river reminds me that healing can take place "anywhere, by any practice, thorough any mediator and at any place."# There may be some of you that need healing today— healing from physical or mental illness, from family dysfunction, from spiritual angst. I ask you to consider that the healing you need may be right in front of you, or inside you. Remember that man that lay by the pool in Bethsaida and was making all kinds of excuses to Jesus about why he hadn't been healed? Jesus asks him a simple question, "Do you want to be healed?" and the man says yes. Jesus tells him to take up his mat; he is healed. When we say a resounding "Yes" to Jesus' question, the healing begins— "new pathways of mind, body, spirit, and relational healing emerge... Healing can come from any sector—a gentle touch, taking your medication prayerfully, ...energy work, meditation, counseling, change of lifestyle and diet. We don't need to go a far distance when God is right here with us."

In Psalm 30, the author lives by the hope that God will transform his mourning to dancing. Listen to vv. 12-13: "You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, ¹²so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever." All of life, both our joys and sorrows can be

brought to God in prayer. "When we open to God, we find healing resources amid our experiences of pain and loss."

In the story of Naaman, let's remember that his cure was initiated by one of the powerless people, the little ones, the captured slave girl. Even though Naaman was very powerful, he did not know what he could do to become well. We never know who may have the right word, the touch, the prayer that will initiate our healing and transformation.

On this July 4th weekend, it's easy to see how much our nation needs healing. We can't fix all the problems; however, it seems to me what each of us can do is to decide how we are called to live. How does our faith inform us to live in this nation we call home, with the tension that the nation may call us to do one thing when our faith, our God, calls us in another direction. Two examples of this in my own life is my belief that Jesus calls us to nonviolence and love of enemies while my country goes to war and kills the enemy; also I yearn for the lack of borders in the world while my country works to build stronger borders, keeping people out.

So much is happening in the world that it is easy to get discouraged. How do we develop the attitude of gratitude and hope that we hear from the psalmist? Can we reclaim some of our simple community values such as "generosity, compassion, friendship, honesty, fairness, sacrifice for a greater good, and care for the whole."# Can this national holiday spur us to go beyond self-interest and personal profit to care for our local and

national communities as well as thinking globally, remembering we are all God's children? Naaman was not a Jew; he was not from Israel yet the prophet of the one God healed him, converting him to monotheism, praising the One God of all. You and I (just like the slave girl) have the ability to be collaborators with God, to connect God's power to the people of the world. All of us have different gifts, yet we all can in one way or another be connectors of the great Spirit to those with whom we encounter. I pray that guided by our faith we can all work on improving and extending the freedoms granted to us by the founders of this country until all people can truly be free. Amen