

## 09 October 2022: 2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c (Proper 23, Year C)

There are obvious connections between the Old Testament reading and the Gospel: leprosy, non-Jewish recipients of miracle, extraordinary responses. Since time is limited, we'll focus only on the Old Testament. The story is easily told and understood on one level; I will not retell it. Nor will I focus much on the healing itself. Rather, let's look at the role of the servants in the story of Naaman's healing.

The first servant is the anonymous kidnapped Jewish slave girl. The text stresses her youth; she was likely younger than 12. The girl first brings her idea to her mistress. The Lord of the manor would likely not have been aware of her existence, let alone interacted with her. She was even more anonymous to Naaman than us.

Clearly, when told of the Jewish healer Naaman expected someone with such power would be well-known to Israel's King, and so sent a letter asking for a consultation. The king's misunderstanding is telling. Typically, prophets were hard on the political, cultural, and economic 'powers that be.' They were harshly critical of any apostasy whether among the rich or poor. Prophets were not pals with the high and mighty or special interest groups; the usual response to prophets was for people to heave rocks in their direction or throw them down wells. The fact that the king's mind did not leap to the conclusion: "Ah! This pagan champion is referring to that pain-in-the-neck Elisha"—fits perfectly with the general job description for 'prophet'.

An insignificant, unknown, powerless, pre-adolescent slave starts him on the path to healing. This is often how God works: quietly, covertly, indirectly, in secret. As an example, you all have been so very loving and supportive of Geri and me. What you do not know are the dozens of teachers, mentors, colleagues, lay people, family, friends, and strangers through whom God has molded us. In like manner, most people have little or no idea of the impact they have had and can have on others' lives. This is part of God's economy of grace. We are to follow Christ, be Christ, proclaim Christ, live in, for, and through Christ wherever, however, with whomever, leaving all results to God. Living the Psalmist's exclamation: *Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your Name give glory; because of your love and because of your faithfulness* (Ps 105:1).

This also puts in context the many passages that call us to Christian living, such as Romans 12: *Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord...contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers...live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are...if it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all...* (9-11, 13, 16, 18). This is not advice for specific situations but living in Christ in all circumstances.

The next scene involving servants is after Elisha, through his servant, tells Naaman to wash in the Jordan River seven times. The mighty warrior is enraged. He has travelled far, humiliated himself in appealing to a third-rate country: the supposed holy man will not see him, sends a servant with ridiculous instructions, refuses to put on a religious show for his benefit, and—the topper—tells him to skinny dip in the muddy Jordan!

Naaman's servants challenge him—risky for their own well-being! They appeal to his common sense: 'If you would willingly do something difficult to be cured, what's the risk in doing something simple?' Here is wisdom for the servants of Christ. Have you ever talked with someone in emotional or spiritual crisis? The person suffering is hostile to or dubious that faith is an answer, intractable in skepticism. The obvious question is, "Well, how's that working for ya?" Common sense leads us to conclude that if our own thinking and actions clearly are not the answer, then perhaps a Power outside ourselves is needed.

As with Jesus turning water into wine in John's Gospel (2:1-11), the servants know the true source of healing and miracle—not the strong warrior, not the King of Israel, not the powerful; the servants know. We can draw this conclusion: being a faithful, courageous, humble servant of Christ is the truest, surest path to know the power of God at work in the world. Do you want to know the power of God—be a servant of Christ's grace, healing, and restoration in all your relationships and environments, and you will see miracles.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, now and for ever. Amen.