

Sermon 2009 Epiphany 6  
February 15, 2009  
Text: 2 Kings 5: 1-14  
Theme: "Do What You're Told and You Might Be Surprised"

Naaman was a great man by all standards. To be the commander of the army for the nation of Syria was amazing. He had risen to the heights of his career. Sadly, he had leprosy.

The name Naaman means beautiful or delightful, leading us to believe that at one time he had been a handsome man. However, leprosy, though not always painful because it kills the nerves, would have left him mutilated without full use of his hands and perhaps missing fingers, toes, ears and nose, appendages that tended to rot away and fall off of lepers. Worse than the physical distress was the social distress that a leper endured. Naaman would have had to be separated from everyone due to the contagiousness of the disease. There was no cure for leprosy.

As a last ditch effort, Naaman was willing to do anything and pay anything to be cured from this dreaded disease. So, although he surely had no faith in the God of the Hebrews, he was desperate when he heard about this holy man who could

heal. But when the holy man told him to go wash in the river, he became indignant. What kind of crack pot was this?

But Elisha understood that healing came not from him but from God – so he simply gave Naaman a faith action to complete. God works through means. Why; because he's God and that's how he chooses to do things. He rarely speaks out of the air, but rather through people and his Word. He rarely heals without tools but through people and physical things. When Naaman finally got over his pride and decided to do what the prophet had told him to do, he was healed.

Leprosy is used often in the Bible because it is so much like sin. It starts from deep within a body and eventually shows itself through small rough, whitish patches on the skin. Over time these grow into tuberculous lesions and eventual death. Now death comes not from the leprosy itself but from opportunistic infections that invade a weakened body.

Sin too starts deep within us and often if invisible as we secretly toy with our sinful thoughts and selfish desires. We harbor the idea that we are better than others. We secretly

refuse to forgive those who have harmed us. We worship our money and our appearance and our abilities as though they were all of our creation building small little altars to ourselves as we put the things of this world over the things of God. No one sees it. In fact, we may look like model Christians on the outside. But sin, like leprosy, is hard at work deep within killing our faith bit by bit and leaving us spiritually hollow.

Like leprosy, sin eventually erupts. Albright Scholar, Horace Hummel puts it poetically. "Sin in our lives is like the jelly in a jelly doughnut. When you squeeze the doughnut, the jelly is going to come out somewhere." Eventually when our lives get squeezed, the sin can no longer be diplomatically contained and out it comes, ugly and painful like leprosy, often leaving us weak and vulnerable for more spiritual harm.

When it is out, sometimes we despair thinking that our lives are over and we are done for. Sometimes we pridefully and arrogantly defend our sin with arguments that shift the blame to another, or to God. When sin erupts in our lives, whether it is a massive eruption or just a small explosion, defending it, justifying

it and despairing of it are all unnecessary, because like Elisha showed Naaman, the Lord has already healed it and cleansed us.

Jesus has given us the cure for sin. Like Yahweh worked through the waters of the Jordan to cure Naaman's leprosy, so does he work through the waters of Baptism to cure our sin. Sin is cured folks. It can no longer have its way with you because Jesus died on the cross to pay for it, took it all to hell and dumped the whole nasty load right at the devil's feet. Sin has no hold over you and like we pray in the general prayer, no sin can terrorize us anymore.

Our problem is not that sin is loose and running wild in our lives. Our problem is that the cure looks too simple and we don't believe in the power we have. We meditate on our navels, revisit our potty training, medicate our over taxed psyches with drugs or alcohol, or sex or food or whatever makes us feel better for the moment and bemoan the sin that seems to rule our lives and cause us pain. OH WOE IS ME, WRETCHED SINNER THAT I AM. Well, but, at least I'm not as bad as that guy over there. Whoops, now add pride to the pile! OH WOE IS ME!

And a little voice from some nobody comes out of nowhere. Hey, go wash yourself in the Baptismal waters and you will be clean. Nah...that's too simple. Surely I have to do certain works of righteousness to atone for my horrible deeds. Surely I have to offer some kind of gift to pay for my poor choices. Surely I have to atone for my sin.

Okay, says the little voice. You go knock yourself out and let me know how it works for you but when you're all tuckered out, just come wash in the waters and you will be clean. Believe Jesus. You have been washed in the waters of baptism and those waters continually flow over you washing away every sin. You are clean and you are holy and there is nothing left to do...well, except come to the table and eat and receive even more strength and grace and forgiveness. Amen.