

Third Sunday after the Epiphany– January 26, 2025
Text: 2 Kings 5:1-15a
Theme: "What" Not "Why"

Leprosy was a terrible disease in Biblical times. The disease itself was horrible, living with your skin rotting off and pieces of your body literally turning black and falling off, but the social aspects of the disease were even worse. Because they had no cure, and the disease was contagious, all they could do was isolate the infected person and try to stop the spread. So, as a leper, one lived a life of isolation. Naaman was a leper.

The Israeli servant girl told her mistress, Naaman's wife, about Elisha in the Northern Kingdom. She must have been captured by one of Syria's raids on Israel and now she was an evangelist. So, the first lesson we learn from this text is that God sometimes puts us in difficult situations so that we have the opportunity to witness His power and love to those who may not know Him. Maybe you are in a situation right now that seems horrible to you. Maybe you have a mean boss, trouble in your marriage, an unfair landlord or a professor who belittles people of faith. Maybe you have asked God why He seems to have abandoned you to the pits of the earth. He has not. You can be certain that whatever challenges you must face, God is there with you to empower you to accomplish whatever He wants you to accomplish. Don't ask "why." "Why" is a useless, faithless question. We are just wasting time and energy by

asking why. Instead, ask "what." What does the Lord have for you to do in whatever situation you are living? What does the Lord want you to teach someone or to learn from someone? What is the Lord doing for the good of others through whatever you are suffering right now?

Naaman went to Israel to see Elisha and was miffed because the prophet did not come to meet him or receive his gifts. He only sent word to go bathe in the Jordan seven times. Naaman asked the faithless question. "Why?" Why should I bathe in the Jordan? Why didn't the prophet receive me? Why was I, a great commander of armies, dismissed like a common servant? He failed to ask "what?" What is the Lord doing through this prophet for me? What miracle awaits me? What amazing gift is the Lord giving without me giving Him anything? What grace awaits me?

You are here today because the Lord has summoned you yet again. You stand before His throne of Grace, just like Naaman, with absolutely nothing He needs. You cannot buy what He has no matter what you are willing to give. If you pay for something, even in a round-about way, like giving extravagant gifts but wanting something in return, you have bought the thing you want and it is no longer a gift. If I give a million dollars to Elmhurst Hospital but demand that a wing to be named after me, it's not a gift. It's a purchase. Naaman had a hard time accepting gifts, being a powerful and rich man. It insulted his pride when the

prophet did not make a show of healing him, and he was even more insulted when the prophet would not accept his offerings. Think here of Cain and Able. Cain was angry when the Lord would not receive his offering, but he received Able's offering. Instead of asking what the Lord is doing here, Cain asked why should Able get all the blessings? He couldn't think of a good answer that appeased his hurt pride, so he killed his brother.

We can only receive God's gifts in humility. Pride and arrogance will always block the gifts of God from reaching us. But our faith grows as we study God's Word and receive His Body and Blood. As our faith grows, we begin to grasp the enormity of what God gives. We begin to see that it is not about us, but about His work on this earth that we are called to do, and that we are privileged to do. When that happens, we become able to receive His gifts in humility.

Elisha knew that Naaman needed a lesson in humility. He had become a prideful man. My southern mother would have said he had gotten "too big for his britches." I never really understood what that meant but I knew it meant that you were being haughty and arrogant.

Elisha knew that Naaman could never receive God's greater gift of salvation if he continued to believe that you had to buy everything. So, Elisha took Naaman down a couple notches. He had to wash in an Israeli

river. He had to follow instructions. He could not buy his way in and Naaman learned, and Naaman was healed. Beyond that, even more miraculously, Naaman was saved. He returned to Elisha and eventually returned to Syria as a believer in God.

God can and will do amazing things when we get our pride out of the way and just do what God tells us to do. That might be the most important lesson to learn from Naaman. Just do what He says. You don't have to understand everything. Not everything will seem logical or even fair. But if God says to do it, just do it. Because He said it, it is the right thing to do. We are blessed with the inerrant Word of God to read whenever we wish. We are blessed to hear the God of the universe speak whenever we wish. And through that Word, He will bless us immeasurably. We never have to ask "why." We only ask "what." What will the Lord do in our lives next? What amazing blessing will He pour out upon me next? What exciting path will He send me down next? Bathe in His river of Grace and drink deeply from the waters.

"They that drink shall live forever. Tis a soul renewing flood. God is faithful: God will never break His covenant of blood, signed when our Redeemer died, sealed when He was glorified."