



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

JULY 7, 2019
THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Small Voices of Hope II Kings 5:1-14; Luke 10:1-11

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. And the king of Aram said, "Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel." He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy." When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me." But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel."

So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

II Kings 5:1-14

Why is it that we sometimes assume that the worst is going to happen to us?

Why is it that we often ignore people who offer us helpful advice?

Why is it that we are often suspicious of people who are trying to help us?

Why do we often think life ought to be harder than it already is?

When Naaman climbed back on his horse, skin youthful and healthy again, and galloped back toward his home in Aram, I wonder if he asked himself these questions. Sometimes I ask myself these questions.

We can understand why a man like Naaman, a commander in the army of Aram, a trusted officer and advisor to his king, might not pay much attention to an enslaved handmaid, particularly a young girl who was one of his “spoils of war.” What could such a girl know about leprosy, a serious and severe disease which could one day alienate Naaman for everyone he knew and loved?

Why shouldn't the King of Israel be suspicious of an enemy army hero showing up unannounced with a wagonload of treasure from a rival king? Surely the request to heal this man of the scourge of leprosy was a trap meant to lure him into another unsuccessful war which would further decimate and humiliate his people.

And why shouldn't Naaman expect the treatment for a disease like leprosy to be difficult and complicated, especially from a prophet of the God of his enemy? Shouldn't he have to perform religious rituals, fast for a period of time, make sacrifices to this unusual God, and pay some sort of fee for a cure? Asking him to do no more than wash in the river to be healed was both a mockery and an insult.

Yet, this fascinating story tells us that the captive handmaid was right in her prescription for Naaman. The King of Israel was wrong about the intentions of his rival. Seven quick dips into the Jordan River were exactly what it took to heal Naaman of his leprosy.

How often do we ignore the small voices of hope that speak to us from unlikely people? A child, a stranger, a rival, an enemy, someone you just met

or a longtime friend might offer advice that you deem ridiculous. How often have you been suspicious of the intentions and generosity of someone who has made a suggestion to you? How often do we ignore that little voice in our head or heart which tells us what to do or not to do? How often do we ignore the small voices of hope?

Some of us expect good advice to come to us only in strong, clear voices with challenging expectations. A simple solution is too easy and, therefore, improbable.

Naaman's experience reminds us that when we listen and pay attention, when we are open to advice and assistance from others, and when we anticipate a positive outcome, we do find the way forward to be easier and better than we expected, no matter how hard and challenging it actually might be.

Had I been one of the seventy people chosen by Jesus to spread throughout Galilee telling people about Jesus and his revelation of God, I think I would have been more than a little anxious and uncertain. What would I say? Could I remember his parables and the surprising things he revealed about God? Would other people even listen? Would I be welcomed or run out of town?

Those seventy people must have been just as apprehensive as Naaman and the King of Israel were because Jesus made this preaching venture sound so simple. Take nothing with you, he said—no money, no bag, no shoes! Expect people to provide whatever you need. Share the Gospel as you received it from me. Take what is offered. Bless and be blessed.

As with Naaman and the King of Israel, God in Christ was teaching people something about trust and simplicity. With God, the solution to our problems are not always the most difficult. Sometimes they are the obvious option which is right before us. Regardless of the challenges we face, when we trust God and the people God sends to help us, even the most daunting circumstances will be manageable for us.

Jesus did not stop there. If you are not welcomed, he said, shake the dust off your bare feet as a sign of protest and then move on to the next village. First, however, let them know that even though they will not listen to your good message, the kingdom of God is still at hand for them. In other words, they may not believe what they hear, but God will still be God, and

God will be with them. God's ways in the world will not be deterred by our approval or rejection.

I think if I had heard Jesus give me these kinds of absurd instructions about being his disciple and sharing the news about him with other people, I would have been just as skeptical as Naaman was over his potential cure. No one in his right mind goes on a trip without money, clothes, and shoes. It is just as absurd as thinking that leprosy can be cured by jumping in the river seven times.

Yet, don't you suppose that in most of the villages the seventy disciples visited, the people welcomed the followers of Jesus? And don't you suppose that they provided a good night's rest and even a pair of slightly used sandals? And don't you think they may have thinned the soup, baked an extra loaf of bread, and made room at the table, in order to provide a refreshing meal for these guests from God?

The table where we break bread with one another is the perfect place to talk and listen. The table is a place to share our stories and confess our fears. At the table, we can ask questions and listen for advice offered by everyone else. At the table, needs are met, wounds healed, hungers satisfied, and enemies made friends. When we listen to the small voices of hope that speak to us out of genuine concern and care, we can be healed of even the worst things that plague humanity like bitterness, resentment, distrust, jealousy, cruelty, and hatred.

The Good News is that when we open ourselves to God's ways in our lives, the needs we have are met, the illnesses that afflict our world are cured, and the community of God becomes obvious all around us. Remember: it is often God's way to speak in a "still, small voice." May we all pay attention to the small voices of hope.

July 7, 2019

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

God who is our Creator, Redeemer, and Friend, we give thanks this day for the bounty of blessings which comes forth from your gracious hand. For the majesty of your creation, for your mercy and peace, for relationships that shape our lives and work that gives purpose to our days, for your abiding presence with us, we offer our thanks and praise. Sometimes, O God, we grow so accustomed to the abundance you bestow that we begin to feel complacent or entitled. Help us to acknowledge that you are the giver of all the good gifts we enjoy and that you give them not because of our deserving but because of your generosity.

We are grateful, too, O God, that we know how to love because you first loved us. In this week when we will reach out to our neighbors in need, teach us to embody your grace and mercy to them. We pray for the homeowners and neighborhoods we will serve. May our presence offer comfort and restore hope. We pray for the volunteers who will give so generously of their time, talents, and resources. May they be blessed, even as they seek to be a blessing. As we rebuild homes, may we also work to rebuild lives. As we repair decaying structures, may we also seek to mend wounded spirits. Work through us, O God, that we might be witnesses of the power of your love. In the tasks that are before us, teach us to rely not on our own abilities but, in humility, to encourage the gifts we find in others and to depend on the strength which comes from you. We give thanks for the opportunities we will have to work, to serve, to speak a kind word, to form relationships and, in all things, to demonstrate the love of Christ. Give us energy, creativity, perseverance, and, above all, compassion, as we seek ways, large and small, to offer your hope and healing. We pray in the name of the Christ who calls us and by the power of the Spirit who equips us. Amen

Elizabeth J. Edwards
Associate Minister