

Rev. Jennifer Peters McCurry
Emanuel's Lutheran Church, Bellevue (Pittsburgh), PA
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2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c
2 Timothy 2:8-15
Luke 17:11-19

Our Old Testament lesson seems like a simple story of healing, sort of like our gospel from Luke. Yet I think it's hard for us to hear these stories, as 21st century Christians. It is a time of amazing medical technology, when we are able to know many things about what is wrong in our bodies, and how they can be healed. It's hard for us not to wonder: How does God's healing differ from what we can get at the doctor's office? To find out, we need to dive into our Old Testament story today.

This guy, Naaman, wasn't just a neighboring king with no connections. Israel was a lot like our country, which has certain hostile relationships with other nations. Naaman's kingdom, Aram, was one of Israel's enemies. Back in *1 Kings 22*, the nation of Aram killed the king of Israel. Naaman himself wasn't involved, but that reflects the hatred and history between the two nations.

We hear this played out in the middle of our story, Naaman had written to the King of Israel trying to find some one to cure his leprosy. You can understand why Israel's king was so upset! The king of Israel said to himself, "Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me." (*2Kgs 5:7*) This ploy simply had to be a

trick that would lead to the king's – or Israel's – destruction. Someone like a king from Aram simply would not call up Israel for medical suggestions. Too much was at stake.

This sensitive, international relationship is the backdrop a much braver moment – one of witness and evangelism. On one of Aram's military campaigns against Israel, they captured a very young girl. We don't know her name, or much more about her. In this tale of the rich and powerful, including kings and prophets, this girl could easily be ignored. She later came to serve Naaman's wife. Yet she is vital to what happens. It is her well-placed, comment that points Naaman toward the God of Israel. "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." (2 *Kgs* 5:3) The girl's recommendation spoke of healing that was possible, through the God of Israel.



One word to her boss sent Naaman on an adventure. He learned where to find Elisha, the prophet of the Lord. He traveled to enemy territory to seek out this man who might heal him. Of course, he brought his own version of the secret service, his "horses and chariots" with him. The king showed up at Elisha's door, with his whole entourage.

It took so much to get there: a letter sent to his enemy seeking help; all the hub-bub required for a king to travel; negotiating sensitive international relations; and guarding against potential security problems. Naaman probably had high expectations of the man who was worthy of this much sacrifice.

After all that, Elisha didn't even bother to come and greet him. King Naaman had come all this way and been dissed. Elisha, a lowly Israelite, sent a messenger out to give the king instructions. As if that weren't enough, this supposed healer clearly knew nothing. Naaman was told to wash in the Jordan seven times. Unbelievable! He's just to bathe – as if he hadn't wished he could just wash this disease off! And the Jordan was nothing like a spring of healing. It was a dingy, dirty stream. This prescription was not worthy of his kingly stature or the costs he had paid.



This story appears in the Old Testament, happening long before Jesus was born. Yet it demonstrates the priorities of the God who was revealed in Christ. God does not reserve healing for the high and mighty. There are no gifts or instructions only for a king. All of us who are broken, or who long for healing, receive the same, frustratingly simple advice: turn to God and the rest will come. Maybe we'd rather have a showy, flashy healing, as Naaman wanted. I know I'd rather have something

easy that focuses only on the ailment at hand – like a pill to take that really does make it all better.

For our lives to heal, we must be changed in more ways than just our little identified ache. That's why the pain reliever or the visits to the doctor aren't enough to fix the problems that we all have. For there are other things in our lives that are out of order, too – our relationships with one another, our stewardship of our selves, our time, and our belongings. When we turn to God for healing first, every part of our lives falls under the Spirit's loving and healing gaze. God's healing restores and nurtures our faith, heals our relationships, and makes our lives whole again.

It's not just that Naaman was healed of his leprosy. His entire life was turned upside down in his search for God. Many of his distorted relationships with the people around him were righted, as he learned to receive their gifts. For the mighty warrior, King Naaman, that involved him receiving advice from a powerless, immigrant, servant girl. He stood, vulnerable, before an enemy king, seeking help, bearing gifts, and arriving at reconciliation. He faced his own anger and pride and self-righteousness, as he had to submit to the authority of a common Hebrew man. And then... he encountered a God who loved him so much that his disease was healed, along with his sin and brokenness.

By the end of our passage, Naaman had found God and finally understood. The inspiration of it all, his leprosy, was healed, simply and miraculously. Along the journey, his heart, and his mind, and his strength were all healed, too. He found faith – and newness, and re-creation, and life, as only God can bring.



None of us are kings, but we all have frustrations about how things are, and hopes that our lives would be better. We hope for healing of some kind, whether it's for us or our family, or our neighborhood. I suspect that most of us here are hoping that our church will be healed, even if that isn't the first word we would have chosen.

The scripture points, as did the servant girl, to God, the creator and healer of our lives. Real, full healing will only happen for us when we seek God. In the journey, we may encounter people whom we expect God to work through, and those who are a surprise (like Naaman's enemy). No matter what, our lives will be blessed by our generous God. With those blessings, our whole world will be transformed into a more beautiful, just, and loving place. Thanks be to God.