

“The Easy Way Out”
Message by DD Adams
Providence Kemptown UMC
7th Sunday After Pentecost
Communion Sunday
July 3, 2016

Today’s Old Testament lesson is from 2 Kings 5:1-19. I’m reading from the *Common English Bible*. Naaman, a general for the king of Aram, was a great man and highly regarded by his master, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. This man was a mighty warrior, but he had a skin disease. Now Aramean raiding parties had gone out and captured a young girl from the land of Israel. She served Naaman’s wife.

She said to her mistress, “I wish that my master could come before the prophet who lives in Samaria. He would cure him of his skin disease.” So Naaman went and told his master what the young girl from the land of Israel had said. Then (A-rum) Aram’s king said, “Go ahead. I will send a letter to Israel’s king.”

So Naaman left. He took along ten kikkars of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. He brought the letter to Israel’s king. It read, “Along with this letter I’m sending you my servant Naaman so you can cure him of his skin disease.” When the king of Israel read the letter, he ripped his clothes. He said, “What? Am I God to hand out death and life? But this king writes me, asking me to cure someone of his skin disease! You must realize that he wants to start a fight with me.”

When Elisha the man of God heard that Israel’s king had ripped his clothes, he sent word to the king: “Why did you rip your clothes? Let the man come to me. Then he’ll know that there’s a prophet in Israel.” Naaman arrived with his horses and chariots. He stopped at the door of Elisha’s house. Elisha sent out a messenger

who said, “Go and wash seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored and become clean.”

But Naaman went away in anger. He said, “I thought for sure that he’d come out, stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the bad spot, and cure the skin disease. Aren’t the rivers in Damascus, the Abana and the Pharpar, better than all Israel’s waters? Couldn’t I wash in them and get clean?” So he turned away and proceeded to leave in anger.

Naaman’s servants came up to him and spoke to him: “Our father, if the prophet had told you to do something difficult, wouldn’t you have done it? All he said to you was, ‘Wash and become clean.’” So Naaman went down and bathed in the Jordan seven times, just as the man of God had said. His skin was restored like that of a young boy, and he became clean.

He returned to the man of God with all his attendants. He came and stood before Elisha, saying, “Now I know for certain that there’s no God anywhere on earth except in Israel. Please accept a gift from your servant.” But Elisha said, “I swear by the life of the LORD I serve that I won’t accept anything.” Naaman urged Elisha to accept something, but he still refused. Then Naaman said, “If not, then let me, your servant, have two mule loads of earth. Your servant will never again offer entirely burned offerings or sacrifices to any other gods except the LORD.

But may the LORD forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master comes into Rimmon’s (*god of the wind and air*) temple to bow down there and is leaning on my arm, I must also bow down in Rimmon’s temple. When I bow down in Rimmon’s temple, may the LORD forgive your servant for doing that.” Elisha said to him, “Go in peace.”

This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God. Let’s pray. God of mercy and all compassion, bless the reading, hearing, understanding, and doing of

your word. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

Peace be with you! Naaman was the General of the army of the king of (Aram) Aram. Scripture states he was a great man with his master and highly respected; it was the **Lord** who had given victory to Aram or Syria over Israel.

Naaman seemed to have everything a man would ever want, *but . . .* there was one major problem. He was a leper, and he wanted a cure, and I bet his wife did too. Information about a cure came to Naaman by way of a young girl from Israel who had been captured during the Syrian raiding parties. The young girl spoke to Naaman's wife about the leprosy and said, "I wish that my master could come before the prophet who lives in Samaria. He would cure him of his skin disease."

Naaman wanted a cure, so he packs up his gold and silver and heads to the king of Israel with a letter. When Naaman comes near, he sends messengers to the king. He freaks out, and says "What? Am I God to hand out death and life . . . to cure someone of his skin disease!" He thinks the king wants to start a fight!

The king of Israel knows that *only God* works miracles through Elisha and could cure Naaman's leprosy. So the king sends Naaman to Elisha the prophet. God was using the pain and humiliation of Naaman's leprosy to bring him to a knowledge of the one true and living God. The God who saves! The proud man Naaman in all his greatness was being brought lower.

When Naaman arrived Elisha sent a messenger out to speak to him and said, "Go and wash seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored and become clean." Naaman speaks, and I'm paraphrasing, "Woa, wait a minute here! I'm insulted and furious! Elisha wants me to do what? You're kidding right? Elisha isn't even coming out to meet me and cure me? You mean I have to do something! I have to get into that filthy water and dip myself 7 times in the Jordan to get clean?"

Why can't he just wave his hand over me? Aren't the rivers in my country better than all Israel's waters? Couldn't I wash in them and get clean?"

As the clock ticks Naaman's pride is pouring out. This great man was being brought lower and lower. Naaman's servants tried to persuade him and said, "Come on just do it! Just go to the Jordan and dip yourself 7 times. It's not that hard. The prophet's messenger said you'd be made clean!"

So Naaman did it. He went to the Jordan and washed, and his skin became as soft as a young boy. Then he goes to Elisha and says, "Now I know for certain that there's no God anywhere on earth except in Israel. Please accept a gift from your servant." But Elisha said, "I swear by the life of the LORD I serve that I won't accept anything."

Naaman was humbled. He was first brought low by receiving instruction from the Israelite slave girl. And in his pride, he almost missed his servants counsel to obey and wash in the Jordan. The advice was too simplistic.

So Naaman got clean in the dirty water and realized, it wasn't the power that was in the water, the power was in the doing of what God said to do. Naaman was changed, both inside and out—spiritually and physically. His downward descent led him to a place of humility until he finally did what the Lord said to do.

Much like us, we search for an easy way out, we make up our own plans, we decide we've had enough, we're hoping for a magic wand, but the Lord brings us all into this downward descent that leads to humility and we see our need. What is it that's bothering you about your life? Have you brought it to the Lord? Naaman was prideful. It seemed foolish to him to wash in the Jordan. It made ABSOLUTELY NO SENSE.

What is most reasonable in our minds is not always what the Lord plans for us. The Lord is waiting for your willing surrender and release of control. Let's do so much more than take the easy way out. Let's humble ourselves before the Lord and do it God's way. Amen.