

2 Kings 5:1-14

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.

“Will God Bless America?”

John Adams (1735-1826), one of the founding fathers of our country, was a key player in our fight for freedom and a powerful voice in the formation of our democratic form of government. He was a man who valued the principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. He was also a man of faith who contemplated God and his relationship with his Creator. In a

May 1756 (Quotable Founding Fathers, p. 246) entry into his diary he reflected on the specific question:

What is the proper Business of Mankind in this Life? He wrote: We came into the world naked and destitute of all the conveniences and necessaries of life. And if we were not provided for, and nourished by our parents or others should inevitably perish as soon as born. We increase in strength of body and mind by slow and insensible degree. 1/3 of our time is consumed in sleep, and ¼ of the remainder is spent in procuring a mere animal sustenance. And if we live to the age of three score and ten and then set down to make an estimate in our minds of the happiness we have enjoyed and the misery we have suffered, we shall find I am apt to think that the overbalance of happiness is quite inconsiderable. We shall find that we have been through the greatest part of our lives pursuing shadows, and empty but glittering phantoms rather than substances. We shall find that we have applied our whole vigour, all our faculties, in the pursuit of honour, or wealth, or learning, or some other such delusive trifle, instead of the real and everlasting excellences of piety and virtue. Habits of contemplating the Deity and his transcendent Excellences, and correspondent habits of complacency in and dependence upon him, habits of reverence and gratitude to God and habits of love and compassion to our fellow men and habits of temperance, recollection and self government will afford us a real and substantial pleasure. We may then exult in a consciousness of the favour of God and the prospect of everlasting felicity.

In John Adams' system of belief, the blessing of God was linked with contemplation of God's excellence, our on dependency God and interdependency with others, and mutual happiness.

In our religious tradition, sacred scripture is one starting place, for faith's contemplation of God---of how God blesses creatures and creation. After his study of a story from 2 Kings, Hebrew scholar Walter Brueggemann wrote this prayer which he entitled: We are children of another world.

For the mystery of the text,
and for the history of eyes to seeing
and ears to hear the text,
we give you thanks.

Our eyes are scaled
and our ears are uncircumcised
and we are children of another world.

We pray for the gift of perception.
we pray for energy and courage,
that we may not leave the text
until we wrench your blessing from it.
Amen. (Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth, p. 81)

Our sacred story today is about Naaman, a military commander who suffered from leprosy. He was not Jewish. He was a citizen of the foreign nation, Aram. His nation was an enemy of Israel and he had won battles over Israel. Now the only thing that the military commander Naaman was powerless to accomplish was to cure his leprosy. In everything else, he had great authority and power. He had been blessed with the power of command over his men. When he spoke, they obeyed. As a victorious military leader, he had been blessed with the power to gain wealth. He was paid handsomely by the king and had acquired slaves on his raids. As a strong fighter for the nation, he had been blessed with the power of status among men. But when he took his armor off at night, he knew that he had not been blessed with the power to cure his ill health. Leprosy had taken over his body. If he had summoned local physicians and faith healers in town, they had not been able to help.

Now fortunately for Naaman, his leprosy was also a concern for the God of Israel. So when the Lord saw Naaman's plight, his Maker sent in the troops to help out him out. First there was his unnamed, powerless slave who told her mistress that the God of Israel could cure him. Next there was the king of Israel, who in his fear, denied being God and having God's power. Then there was God's prophet, Elisha, who told him that all he had to do was to do wash in the Jordan river seven times. And, finally there was Namaan's servant who knocked him off his high horse of arrogance with a good dose of common sense. "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?" From

this text, we can wrench many blessings of insight into our selves, God, and faith.

Naaman's starting place of faith in Israel's God to cure him was not scripture, but rather in his personal experience of his own powerless to cure his skin disease. His journey required a radical humbling of his arrogant sense of power. He emptied himself by listening to voices of powerless slaves and by obeying a foreign God's word of cure.

God's healing is neither supernatural nor magical. God heals in and through the created order. "Go wash in the Jordan." 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. Healing energy that is consistent with the natural healing ways embedded in God's creation, can result in a cure.

God's healing occurs within our complex web of social, political, and economic relationships. God's healing depends upon the faithful action of God's people to stand up and participate in the healing work of the Lord.

Many questions came to my mind as I thought about this scripture, blessings, and the happiness of our nation on this fourth of July. Will God bless America with a cure for our sickness? How is God calling us to help with the healing of our wall street greed; to stop the bleeding of the earth's ocean beds and the poisoning of our waters; to end the violence that we do to one another; to revise our health care system so that every person can receive health care; to find a way to welcome the alien and immigrant among us; to end slave labor in the global economy; to heal our congregations . . . ? Even if we get on board with the business of the Lord, is it too late for God to effect a cure?

Today as we gather together at the table of communion with God and each other, let us remember how Jesus embraced every person in the healing light and circle of God's love. And let us praise God and give thanks, that through faith in God's healing will for the world and through our participation in the healing ways of the Lord, its is never too late for a cure.