

6th Sunday after Epiphany – B
LSB #435
Text – 2 Kings 5:11

But Naaman was angry & went away, saying, “Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me & stand & call upon the name of the LORD his God, & wave his hand over the place & cure the leper.”

BEHOLD, I THOUGHT

A man had been sitting in his recliner chair for about six hours, watching football one Sunday afternoon, when his wife walked through the room. Upon seeing her, he was reminded to tell her something he’d been thinking about for awhile. Since he’d finally come to a conclusion, he said to her:

“Honey, I want you to know that I never want to live in a vegetative state dependent on some machine. If that ever happens, just pull the plug.” Now, he thought he & his wife were on the same page, but she walked over & unplugged the television!

PAUSE

Sitting in a recliner chair, drinking beer & watching football or NASCAR, a lot of men dream of such a life. Others see that as not much more than being in a coma. The art of communication is seen as one of the keys to marriage because too often we just assume that everyone understands what we mean, even when we don’t really say it.

“Behold, I thought...” said Naaman. He thought that he & Elisha were on the same page with this healing of the leprosy thing. Naaman already had it in mind how this healing would go down. “I thought that he would surely come out to me, & stand & call upon the name of the LORD his God, & wave his hand over the place & cure the leper.”

It was going to be quite some show. There'd be drama & action. Then – the miracle. And who was going to be at the center of it all – Naaman! It's like the healing of the leprosy was a secondary issue in his mind. The fame, the glory, & the boost to his reputation, seem to have been the primary issue for him. Look how the mighty warrior Naaman was healed! Certainly, if any man deserved to have his leprosy cured, it is he, the victorious commander of the army of the king of Syria. “Behold, I thought...” said Naaman.

But Yahweh hadn't thought that way at all. Naaman's plan was not how this healing was going down. The text from 2nd Kings gives a clue early on. Naaman is described as a great & mighty man of valor. The servant, telling about the prophet who could heal leprosy, is described as an insignificant little girl.

Naaman's pride, inborn also in each of us, had been greatly strengthened by the exalted position he held in Syria. There, everyone would've bowed before him, & served him, in a most reverential manner, with no exception but his lord the king. Naaman's greatest need was not for physical healing, but for a lesson in humility – a lesson in the great versus the small.

God uses an insignificant slave girl to direct Naaman to a socially inferior prophet. He insults Naaman, by not appearing before this mighty commander in person, but merely sends a messenger. Finally, the message is to wash in the Jordan River, which in spite of its sacred reputation among Christians today, was little more than a filthy creek to Naaman's people.

If you're getting the idea that God designed this healing process to be the exactly the opposite of everything Naaman thought, then you're on track. Maybe you've even

noticed the same sort of pattern in your own life. You research, you plan, you organize, you assume. Then, in spite of all of that, everything goes in a totally different direction.

At that moment, when time has run out, you're left with two basic options. You go with the flow, trusting that God is guiding things for your good, or you fight it. God boxed Naaman into a corner for one purpose – giving him a specific opportunity to put to use the faith, in Yahweh's Words, that Yahweh Himself had placed into Naaman's heart.

We may say to ourselves, “Why does God put us into such ‘make or break’ situations?”

Because our ability to think has been corrupted by sin, the risk seems overwhelming. It seems to us that God is playing with fire, but we need to remember that our heavenly Father always intends for success in those opportunities. He's always there, always ready & always willing, to grant us faith to believe His Words & promises. He never intends for unbelief to be the result.

God never intended for Judas to betray Jesus, but knowing it would happen, God used it to bring about the once & forever sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Even the sin of betraying Jesus was paid for. Would Judas use the faith Yahweh had placed into his heart, or would he reject it? Would Naaman use that faith, or would he reject it? ***PAUSE***

You & I have found ourselves in the same predicament – boxed into a corner. Do we trust the seemingly insignificant gift Yahweh has given us, through an insignificant, even a despised messenger, or do we reject Him & choose what seems powerful & dramatic, according to the ways of our pride, & the ways of the world?

Wealth appears powerful & dramatic. Giving a generous offering seems weak & insignificant. Choosing a career in Law, or Medicine, can seem powerful & dramatic. Following in the footsteps of a Lutheran school teacher can appear weak & insignificant.

Yet, I've met a fair # of lawyers who once thought that was God's plan for them, only to realize that the ministry is where God intended them to be. They had been boxed into a corner & were forced, either to use the faith given them, or to lose it. Unbelief would have led to no benefit. Naaman's servants gave him the same message; unbelief would lead to no healing.

At the end of his rope, Naaman took the advice of his servants, humbled himself & followed the wholly insignificant instructions of the socially inferior prophet, & he was healed. He wasn't even allowed to be touched by Elisha lest Naaman give credit where it was not due. "Go & wash in the Jordan seven times, & your flesh shall be restored, & you shall be clean." God's Word & promise of healing was true, no matter if Naaman believed it or not. The same is true of our sins, they are paid for, no matter if we believe it or not. Yet if we choose to rebel, if we choose not to believe, then we will not receive the benefit of our Lord's gracious love, & almighty power. ***PAUSE***

There'll be times in life when God boxes you in, times when what you thought is not how it was meant to be. Those times will come for a purpose – giving you a specific opportunity to put to use the faith, in His Words, that Yahweh Himself has placed into your heart.

Does school drag your spirit down? Is your job tedious & unexciting? Is your marriage lacking in pizzazz? Does your spiritual life seem boring? Maybe God

designed it that way just for you, so you have a specific, concrete, opportunity to put to use the faith, in His Words, that Yahweh Himself has placed into your heart.

Naaman thought God would work through majesty & glory, through magnificence & drama. Oftentimes we find ourselves having thought that God would work through Christians who never offend, never disappoint, & never have a discouraging word. Oftentimes we find ourselves having thought if he or if she were really a Christian they'd never act that way.

The Pharisees thought if Jesus were really Messiah He'd never eat with tax collectors & sinners. Peter thought if Jesus were really Messiah He'd never have to die in Jerusalem. Maybe you never thought that God would work through sewage to give us new sanctuary carpeting, & a new gym floor? “Behold, I thought...” Those are dangerous words.

Naaman's pride almost kept him from receiving Yahweh's divine blessing. Years later he may have looked back on that & used it, in an evangelism opportunity, to point out that God, at times, boxes us in to an inescapable corner for the purpose of giving us opportunity to use the faith Yahweh Himself has blessed us with. Will Yahweh carry out His promise in spite of completely mundane, insignificant & even boring means? Will Yahweh carry out His purpose in spite of the sin all around us, & even the sin within us? The story of Naaman was given to answer exactly those sorts of questions with a resounding, “Yes, He will.”

The story of Naaman was given to you & to me that the almighty Word of God might replace in our hearts & minds, “Behold, I thought,” with the words, “Behold, I

believe," I believe in the forgiveness of my sins, the resurrection of my body & my life everlasting. Amen.

Come in poverty & meanness, come defiled, without, within; from infection & uncleanness, from the leprosy of sin, wash your robes & make them white; ye shall walk with God in light. Come in sorrow & contrition, wounded, impotent & blind; here the guilty, free remission, here the troubled peace may find. Health this fountain will restore; they that drink shall thirst no more. Amen.