**July 6, 2019**

**2 Kings 5:1-15**

Naaman was an enemy army commander who had long been plagued with a vexing skin condition. (We don’t know what exactly; biblical writers label everything from acne to psoriasis as “leprosy.”) Naaman had taken an Israeli girl – a Jewish girl – as a slave in his recent conquest. So it came to be that this foreign slave was living in her conqueror’s house, serving her conqueror’s wife. Then, in what must have been a series of unexpected and unusual interactions, this Jewish slave 1) noticed her conqueror’s skin condition, 2) cared to help, 3) had the opportunity to talk with his mistress in a way that she understood (for surely they spoke different languages), and 4) others were convinced that this slave-girl’s suggestion was worth pursuing. These foreigners decided to seek the help of an unknown prophet who served an unknown God in another country and language. Through this strange tale, Naaman returned to Israel to meet the prophet Elisha.

Because he did so, we must believe that Naaman was weary of his disease and **desperate** to try anything that might work. His behavior isn’t unusual. We can name friends and family who have struggled lived with untreatable or terminal conditions. After suffering for years, many are willing to try dozens of healing techniques, visit different medical clinics, and meet faith healers – all with the hope of finding *some* relief. Even if they can’t be cured, they’d be happy for reduced pain or extended life.

Such is Naaman. Willing to go to extreme lengths for the possibility of healing. He had money and power and opportunities in his travel to expand his options. If there was an easy answer, an easy cure, he would have found it by now. But he was still sick.

The prophet Elisha sent a message to Naaman to wash seven times in the Jordan River, which seemed an insult to Naaman. He raged, “Are you kidding me?? I’ve come this far, through nicer waters, and you want me to wash in your Israeli river? Ridiculous!” To which a servant responded, “Surely you would try the prophet’s suggestion if it were more difficult? Why not try this simple thing?” Then Naaman, an accomplished commander, humbled himself to accept the wisdom of the foreign prophet and his servant. He went and washed and was healed.

Fifteen years ago the office supply company, Staples, had a series of commercials that detailed life challenges – from changing dirty diapers to solving calculus problems to performing detailed neurosurgery. The question was then posed, “Wouldn’t it be nice if there was an easy button for life?” At which point someone would walk in with an Easy button: a palm-sized, round, red button with the word “EASY” stamped across the top. Whenever pressed, it accomplished the challenging task and proclaimed, “That was easy!” The commercials were so successful that the button itself became an actual product available for purchase from Staples. And people buy these Easy buttons. People pay money ($7) for a fake button that could solve their problems.

We do like it when life hands us a simple solution, but like Naaman, we tend not to trust something if it’s *too* easy… We don’t trust a price that’s too low; something must be wrong with the product. We don’t trust paperwork that is approved too quickly; perhaps the process is flawed. If everything is coming up roses, there must be trouble ahead… There’s something about earning our successes and survival that makes us feel better and stronger.

Naaman didn’t trust the easy healing offered to him. After all the years he suffered, after all the failed treatments, how could it possibly be so simple as to take a bath in the river? And yet... When he did so, his skin “was restored like that of a young boy, and he was clean.” Moreover, this search for healing which had nothing to do with faith or spirituality became the impetus for Naaman – a foreign Gentile – to profess faith in the God of Israel; Elisha showed him salvation in body and soul.

At its heart, faith is an invitation to accept God’s mysteries without knowing or understanding the how or why... When we want to make it more complicated – like Adam & Eve’s desire to learn more by eating the fruit, or the town of Babel’s desire to climb to God’s height, or even Jesus’ disciples’ continual attempts to understand what Christ was really saying – God continually shows us in scripture that it is not our job to know or even discover the answers. Adam & Eve were pushed farther from God’s garden. The town of Babel was scattered across the earth. The disciples fell further and further into confusion’s black hole…

God doesn’t need us to pass an exam for salvation. Faith is an invitation to accept that God alone is omnipotent, omniscient, immortal, almighty, and Lord of Heaven and Earth. We cannot understand God’s ways or being; consequently, God’s ways and being will always be veiled in mystery. When we accept the mysteries as they are, we free ourselves to receive God’s grace and true faith. It is that easy. As the Shaker hymn sings, “Tis the gift to be simple, tis the gift to be free. Tis the gift to come down where you ought to be. And when we find ourselves in the place just right, ‘twill be in the valley of love and delight.”

Tis a gift to simply bask in God’s desire for us – without giving a list of all the reasons that God *shouldn’t* love us. Tis a gift to simply accept Christ’s offer of salvation – without figuring out exactly how we are saved. Tis a gift to be washed in the simple, cleansing waters of baptism – without worrying about what comes next. Tis a gift to be invited again and again to the Communion Table where there are only simple gifts of bread and wine – without trying to describe exactly where God is in this meal, or pin-pointing why these crumbs might actually change our lives.

Communion is our monthly opportunity to hit God’s EASY button. This is where we bring our broken selves – trials and troubles, sins and sorrows – weary of the ways of the world, and desperate for a glimpse of something more. This is the place where we stand around crying out for food and healing and grace and mercy. So we arrive at the Table where we see bread and juice. We hear familiar words. And we think, “really? Are you kidding me? I’ve been eating bread all week and *this* bread is supposed to be different? *This* bread is supposed to fill us all? *This* bread is supposed to satisfy our hunger in body and soul? *This*bread is Christ’s body broken for the world?” To which Christ responds, “Yes. This is my body given for you. Whoever eats this bread will never hunger. Whoever drinks this cup will never thirst. Whoever shares this meal will live forever.”

So we have a choice. We could smile and nod politely, then walk away, shaking our head over this ridiculous possibility Jesus offered. Or, like Naaman, we could humble ourselves to accept that it *really* might be this easy.

Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, explained that “it’s the really hungry who can smell fresh bread a mile away. For those who know their need, God is immediate – not an idea, not a theory, but life, food, air for the stifled spirit and the beaten, despised, exploited body.” [[1]](#footnote-1)

Taste and see the life God gives today. Taste and see the food God prepares for those who are really hungry for healing, for hope, for grace, for mercy, for love, for rest, for peace. All is ready for you, for us. Nothing is required but a willing heart. Come. Taste and see. Amen.

1. Miles, Sara. Take This Bread. Ballantine Books, 2008. pg 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)