

Epiphany 6

2 Kings 5:1-14

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Mark 1:40-45

Psalms 30

Focus: Arrogance to faith, faith to sharing

Function:

Let's see how to put Naaman's story in context.

You are King of Samaria,

the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Your northern border

is dominated by the far larger neighbor

Aram, or Assyria.

For all your memory,

nearly all the history of your Kingdom,

Assyria has effectively picked on you.

If we were casting the roles of

Benhadad II and Naaman

who would you choose?

Let's see

– Kings are generally older

so maybe John Wayne,

and Arnold Schwarzenegger

as Naaman;

or perhaps Sylvester Stallone

and Vin Diesel;

you get the idea.

Joram,

King of Samaria,

receives a letter from Benhadad

with an abundance of gifts,

which is proper protocol,

saying:

*I have sent my Commanding General
to you, so you may cure him of his
leprosy.*

It's unfortunate

that the king leaves out

the slave girl's reference to Elisha;

it's also revealing

that Joram never even thinks of Elisha,

or appealing to God,

he immediately thinks of

the political

and military implications,
and rips his cloths,
a gesture of despair.

Fortunately for him,

in the days way before texting,
word of his plight reaches Elisha,
who sends for Naaman.

When Naaman arrives,

Elisha sends the rather simple instructions
to him to wash in the Jordan River.

He is furious.

For **him**,

commander of the great Aram Army,

the prophet should come down

and make whatever prophetic motions

muttering whatever prophetic words

are necessary.

It strikes me as remarkably arrogant.

For **him** ~ pomp and circumstances are required.

His arrogance

is also revealed in his statement

that the rivers of Aram

are better than the rivers of Israel.

You know the rest of the reading,

at the suggestion of aides,

he does as instructed,

and is healed.

What's interesting

is to read the next several verses.

Naaman wants to give Elisha the gifts,

he refuses.

Naaman then asks for two mule loads of dirt,

so he can worship God,

because he now knows

there is no other real God.

FYI – in the day

gods are associated with place,

so Naaman is taking some of the place,

so he can worship properly.

Adding these verses

expands the story

from one of a miracle cure

to one that moves from

Naaman's arrogance

to his faith,

via an experience of healing;

faith in God becomes the focus.

The story from Mark's Gospel account

also involves healing of leprosy.

However,

Mark's tale begins with faith.

Even in Elisha's day it was known

that only God

can give life,

can heal diseases such as Leprosy

(Joram wasn't totally off base).

The leper approaches Jesus

believing Jesus,

knowing Jesus can heal him,

if Jesus chooses to.

Perhaps from pity, or from anger

(the Greek word implies both)

anger at demons

who cause such terrible diseases,

or anger at the Priests, and society

who so completely isolate

and reject God's people

when they are terribly afflicted,
Jesus chooses to heal him.

It's curious

that in semi Jewish territory,
he instructs him to follow Mosaic Law,
as described in Leviticus (14:10 ff).

The text doesn't comment

on his reaction to those instructions;
I believe the implication is
he knows what to do.

What's intriguing is

that he doesn't.

We know the leper

goes all over the place

freely telling any and everyone
what happened.

Does he deliberately disobey

the instructions to present himself
to the priest,

maybe because he knows
what's done is done,
and;

like Simon, Andrew,

James and John,

wants everyone to know
about the new,

really, really good,

healer in town.

Or, is he so inspired

by what God, through Jesus,

has done for him,

he cannot

– not share the story.

And remember

being healed from Leprosy

is far more than a medical cure;

it is the priest's role,

to pronounce a person clean

thereby **restoring them**

to the community.

The man is more than healed,

he is restored to wholeness,

he can go home!

I rather suspect the latter,

because I see in this event

movement from faith to praise.

This movement of faith to praise

is buried in Psalm 30.

In verse 2

the psalmist cries out to God,

in verse 3

the psalmist is restored, and

in verse 4

the psalmist sings praises to God.

You see the same pattern

in verses 9 & 11, 12

and 13 culminating in a shout out.

Jesus' instructions to the leper

implies he has knowledge of scripture.

That being said,

it's reasonable to think the leper

has knowledge of the psalms,

and thus follows the pattern,

and shouts out,

sings praises to God

for what God has done

through this rabbi Jesus.

And remember at this point,

Jesus is only known as an intenerate Rabbi,

nothing more,
certainly nothing divine.

When you put these two stories

beside each other,

and yes we have to ignore

the intervening several years,

we see a story line that moves from

arrogance, to faith

and faith to exuberant praise.

It moves from

an ego centric, self-centeredness,

to acute awareness of God,

to an energetic divine centric,

unconstrained

God centered way of life.

I rather believe,

I'm rather afraid,

it's the path God, in Jesus Christ

is calling us,

as individuals and as a community,

to walk.

Afraid? you may ask

-well yes,

because I know what it means to do so.

Not by my own experience,

but more fully by what Paul writes.

He compares the calling

to live a Christ centered life,

to do this disciple thing,

to living the life of an athlete.

And we all know

how committed and costly

the life of competitive athlete is.

It's not an exaggeration to say

nothing else matters.

And the cost is not primarily financial,

the cost is personal,

what relations and prestige

you put at risk,

and often give up,

just to have a chance,
often a really small chance,
to be the one
who wins **the** race,
who wins **the** game.

Paul is completely aware
of the limits to this metaphor,
but it is important to name it anyway.

In any competition
there is only one winner.

In making the commitment
to grow from arrogance to faith
to unconstrained praise,

everyone is a winner.

But, you **do** have to make the commitment.

As the Christ fueled light of Epiphany

grows and grows,

we are all blessed

to grow in faith,

in proclaiming the Kingdom of God **is** here.