2 Kings 5:1-14

Psalm 30
Galatians 6:7-16
Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Naaman was a man of power and prestige, yet he was brought to his knees by illness, that while not life-threatening was certainly life-changing. In the ancient Near East, leprosy was a disease that separated a person from society and sometimes from ones family. A leper was an outcast and often forced to live outside the city walls. Naaman, being the commander of the army, was not treated that harshly, but he obviously wanted to be cured. He would grasp at any straw to be made whole again. He would even listen to the suggestion of his wife’s slave … a slave who was young and female, a captive and a despised foreigner…not at all the type of person that Naaman normally would listen to. But there she was, right in front of him as it were, offering an answer to his desire to be healed.

Naaman went to his king, the King of Aram, to seek approval for travel to Israel, an enemy land, in the hopes of finding a cure for his leprosy. The king was supportive and wrote a letter to the King of Israel on Naaman’s behalf. Well, as we heard this morning, that letter created quite a stir. The King of Israel didn’t see himself in the role of a healer. He didn’t have a clue as to what he should do to rid Naaman of this leprosy. And he was afraid that the letter was a plot to start another war.

Somehow, Elisha, the prophet, heard about all this and sent a message to the King reminding him that prophets were healers and that Elisha was his neighborhood prophet. Once again, what was needed for Naaman’s healing was close at hand, if only the king of Israel would look beyond himself and his own petty preoccupations. So Naaman went to Elisha, dragging along his whole traveling party: horses, chariots, soldiers, servants. Can you imagine all these folks pulling up in front of your house? What would you do? Would you rush out to greet them, or just wait for the knock at the door? It seems that Elisha waited, and not only waited, but stalled. He sent a servant to deal with Naaman. Naaman became angry because his expectations were not being met. Not only did he not get to meet the great prophet, Elisha, but he was told that washing in the local river would cure him of his leprosy. How preposterous! He was ready to head home in a huff, but surprisingly, he again listened to the counsel of servants.

For some reason, his servants had faith in this prophet of Israel. They had hope that washing completely, seven times in this local river, would be effective. Perhaps they could sense that the power to heal was near at hand. And indeed it was. Naaman went down into the River Jordan, immersed himself seven times, and his flesh became “like that of a young boy.” Dying to his expectations, he experienced a new creation on terms other than his own.1 Imperfectly yet persistently, God’s kingdom came a little bit nearer to Naaman through the efforts of a diverse cast of characters. What was right in front of Naaman’s eyes, really was the best of all possible answers. Sometimes, that is how God works. The answer to our most persistent need or supplication is right in front of our noses. Such are the mysterious and marvelous ways of our God.

Turning to Paul’s letter to the Galatians, we heard today how he instructed those early Christians about the nearness of God’s kingdom, about what it meant to live in the Spirit, about the importance of being focused on the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul urged them to take advantage of the opportunities God provided to be of service to others. He insisted that they do good to all people. And he was especially adamant about their doing good at home first, loving not only their closest neighbors, but especially their family, including their faith family.2  I imagine that we all have some difficulty loving certain members of our family, whether they are family by birth or family by law or family by faith. However, our call is to be persistent in trying to love others, no matter how imperfect our efforts are. This letter to the Galatians reminds us that we are called to live in community, that we are challenged to continuously extend the leaves of the tables at which we sit, in order to make room for other folks - folks who might surprise us by the gifts and opportunities that they bring to the table. In listening, in hospitality, in surprise, we catch a richer glimpse of God’s reality, we are invited into God’s new creation, we are strengthened by the energy of God’s Spirit, lest we grow weary.3

In the Good News according to Luke, we heard this morning that Jesus sent out 70 disciples to go ahead of him to prepare the way, to proclaim peace, to give witness to the nearness of God.

We have heard about the mission of the 12 apostles in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, but this mission of the 70 is peculiar to Luke. While the mission of the 12 apostles represents the Church’s mission to the 12 tribes of Israel, this mission of the 70 is the Church’s mission to all the nations of the world. Luke is very clear about this. Jesus commands us to go out into the whole world, to spread the good news of God’s salvation to the ends of the earth.

And Jesus provided instructions as to how these 70 disciples were to minister, to reach out, to proclaim this good news. He instructed them not to burden themselves with unnecessary things – no purse, nor bag, nor sandals. They were to go forth in a spirit of abundance rather than in dread of scarcity. They were to offer God’s peace to all, without worrying about who accepted them or who rejected them. This good news was for everyone. Period.

Jesus’ instructions to the 70 were meant for us as well. As disciples of Jesus we are to be hospitable, faithful, generous. We are to labor on imperfectly yet persistently, regardless of the reception we receive.4 We are to bring God’s invitation to all those we meet, regardless of who they might seem to be. We are to live in the power of God’s Spirit, regardless of how uncomfortable that might make us, regardless of the cost to us personally.

“The harvest is plentiful,” Jesus said. So “let us not grow weary in doing what is right,” Let us continue to do the work that Jesus has called us to do. Let us build up of the Body of Christ in this place, and give glory to God as we do so, for this God is a God who makes all things possible.

1. “Blessed are the Poor in Spirit,” The Living Church, Vol. 247, No. 1, July 7, 2013. P.26
2. http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/thisWeek/index.php
3. http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\_id=1685
4. http://www.patheos.com/blogs/livingaholyadventure/2013/07/the-adventurous-lectionary-for-july-7-transformation-is-right-in-front-of-you/