

July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022

Year C; Proper 9

2 Kings 5: 1-14

Psalm 30

Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20

## **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.

*“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”*

Once more the Old Testament readings from 1<sup>st</sup> and now 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings bring us just the reading we need today. On this joyous and holy day of baptism for Virginia James Townsend, our reading speaks of the waters, the beautiful waters, gifts from God, the waters of healing in our reading, and the waters of baptism in a few minutes when we gather at the font.

At the font we will pour the water and we will simply catch up with what God has known and held since the moment of Virginia’s birth: that she is a beloved child of God’s heart and she is marked as Christ’s own forever.

But before we move to the font, a few minutes on this story from Kings which centers around Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, a mighty, powerful warrior.

Naaman is feared and respected, but brought low by the disease of leprosy, ruining and disfiguring his skin, and making others shy away from him.

With all his weapons and strength, Naaman can not help himself, and he cannot heal himself.

And of all the possible vessels of healing waters, a young girl, who has been captured in war from the land of Israel; she has all strikes against her: she is female, she is enslaved, she is young. In that society, and often still sadly in ours today, she had no voice and no worth,.

And yet still, she does not believe what is said of her, and she bravely speaks up, and speaks up to help.

*"If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."*

And so Naaman goes to his king, the king of Aram, and asks for help in getting to the prophet the girl enslaved named.

And the King of Aram, confident in HIS power, says, no problem! I’ll write a letter, send a few gifts and it is a done deal.

So Naaman heads to Israel, traveling heavy! With gold and silver and garments, and the letter for the king of Israel.

When the king of Israel reads the letter, he freaks out, assuming the request for a cure for Naaman's leprosy is a trap, a ploy to start a quarrel and as all kings know, sharpen your swords, as quarrels will lead to fighting and then onward to war.

Finally, the prophet that the enslaved girl spoke of, not all these kings, enters the story, and it is Elisha!

Elisha tells the king of Israel to calm down and just send Naaman to him.

Naaman arrives at the prophet's front door, bringing his soldiers and chariots and horses (the gold and silver and garments were given to the king; prophets never get gifts).

Elisha does not answer the door himself, just sends word, a word of healing, a simple, beautiful message of healing, hope, new life.

*"Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean."*

But for a warrior who likes to travel heavy, this simple word is heard as an insult; Naaman's pride blocks his healing. He is finally on the doorstep of new life, and he instead rages that Elisha had not been so impressed by the warrior as to come out and see him, and to do something fancy to cure the leprosy, at least a lot of hand waving and calling out to his God!

Go wash in the Jordan?! Naaman starts on part two of his rage: how could I be cured in a foreign river?

We have way better rivers back home! How could this so called prophet offer this foreign river for my healing, how could anything foreign hold new life?

And again, it is the powerless who re-open the path to healing. First the young, enslaved girl, now as Naaman rages, it is his servants, the men who serve him, who gently suggest that Naaman give the simple cure a try?

And you can just see Naaman, still in his fury grumping off to the Jordan River, removing the layers of his power, his weapons, his armor, his wealth, and stomping into the river, naked and human,

his suffering and shame visible to all, the leprosy of his skin no longer hidden.

And the first and second times he goes down into the river, his anger is still there, but maybe on the third or fourth immersion, the anger starts to loosen and wash away, and by the fifth he is simply Naaman, and by the seventh splash, he emerges from the water healed, clean, and his flesh like that of a young boy.

His old flesh perhaps once more as young as the enslaved girl who pointed him to new life.

As we gather in a moment to baptize Virginia, to splash with her in these lifegiving waters, we must remember that in baptism we do not become the powerful, the wealthy, the privileged.

The waters bring new life but not gold or silver or rich garments. Our call as Christians is not to be the warrior or the king, but to hear the wisdom in those this world views as powerless, useless, enslaved.

As Christians we are called to follow our savior and brother Jesus, who had no home, who ate with the outcasts, and who preached radical lifegiving love.

In Virginia's baptism may we all be reminded of our call as Christians, to feel again the water and the oil on our foreheads, and to know that we are indeed, marked as Christ's own forever, with all the love and challenge those words hold.

Amen.