

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

February 15, 2009
6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

2 Kings 5:1-14

¹Naaman, 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. ²Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. ³She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." ⁴So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. ⁵And 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. ⁶He 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." ⁷When 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."

⁸But 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." ⁹So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. ¹⁰Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." ¹¹But 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! ¹²Are 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. ¹³But 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'?" ¹⁴So 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.

Mark 1:40-45

⁴⁰A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose, you can make me clean." ⁴¹Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!" ⁴²Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. ⁴³After sternly

warning him he sent him away at once, ⁴⁴saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." ⁴⁵But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

"Healing Spirit"

Robert Gibbs, the White House Press Secretary was giving his daily briefing the other day. In that briefing, one of the reports was pressing him with continual questions about Caterpillar. Not the furry little worms that turn into butterflies, but the mega construction equipment manufacturer that President Obama referenced in his speech to the American people on Monday.

At the time the President was asserting that passage of the stimulus package would mean that Caterpillar would be able to rehire at least some of the employees that they had laid off only a few weeks ago. It appears that the President was a bit presumptuous in making that statement.

Jim Owens, the CEO of the Caterpillar has now stated that passage of the stimulus package does not mean that people will quickly be re-hired. The result is that the whole incident has caused somewhat of a brouhaha in the media, and that was reflected ever so clearly in barrage of questions that were asked regarding the topic in recent White House briefings.

I dare say, that as I listened to the questions it became somewhat clear that those questions were not going to be answered in a way that would satisfy those who were doing the asking.

It is that same sort of catch 22 that I come upon as I approach these stories of healing. No matter how we look at the story or see how it functions in the book of Second Kings or in the book of Mark, in the end

there is always the question of why is not so and so who is my loved one healed like this one that we read about. Why not?

Truly it is not that we question the ability of the Christ or the Spirit of God to heal. We know for sure that such is within God's gracious and amazing reach. Rather we doubt that God will choose to heal our beloved or even us of that which afflicts. It then leads to all those questions that people ask about having enough faith or praying hard enough or long enough.

Let me say that my witness to healing is that each of us has been healed, even when our physical ailments do not go away; still we are the ones who have been healed. That healing took place in the cross where Christ was victorious over the powers of death and God raised him up from the dead. It is into that moment that we are drawn and it is in that moment that our complete healing has already taken place even if we do not bear it in our bodies.

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I'll be saying more about physical healing in the public forum following worship today. What I want to pick up on is the fact that I just attested to—that all of us have been healed. And I want to take that a step farther and challenge us all as the healed to be the healer.

We are called to "healing spirit" in the Body of Christ, and we are called to live that fully. This morning I want us to look at the action of Jesus here in this text and see in his very movement we are called as ones who are to be healers of this world and age. Someone may challenge me that I am placing us in the role of Jesus here.

Do know that such is precisely my intention. The Church is, in the language of Paul the Apostle, the Body of Christ. Through the vibrancy of the Holy Spirit we are not only to represent Christ to the world, but we are

the Christ—physically, spiritually, resurrected we are the Christ to the world. As such we are called to this ministry of healing. You and I are healers of this age, and I see that manifesting itself in the very action of Jesus here as he encounters the leper in Mark Chapter 1.

It is a wonderful story. As the story goes first notice the posture of the man with leprosy. He comes to Jesus begging and kneeling. It says something about how we should come before God; this is how we should be presenting ourselves: bent down, humbled, kneeling, pleading, and pouring out ourselves before the Holy Spirit of God who is longing for us to be completely open and transparent before God.

And we are told in verse 41: “Moved with pity...” Jesus is moved with pity. Now, so many of us translate pity into feeling sorry for the man. Sympathy, mercy, compassion are the words that we would use to describe what pity is. Indeed it is that Jesus was moved with compassion.

But here, the original Greek is not so neat and clean. There is that sense where pity is compassion, and it has a quiet humbleness to it, yet that is not the only way to translate how Jesus is moved here. “Moved with pity...” can just as legitimately be translated from many of the original Greek manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark as “Moved with anger.” Indeed, I think the best rendering here is really “snorting with indignation.” So the text could read that Jesus was snorting with indignation. That is cranked up a notch from “moved with pity.”

We need to get what is going on here. This man, this one with the leprosy, he has been rejected. He is not welcome in the place where the religious people of his day gather. He has been rejected by the community and certainly by the establishment as ritually unclean. To come near him

is a risk, and to be in close proximity would not have been done. He was cast out to be with the other lepers.

So Jesus can be seen here as merely moved with pity, but it probably is more of a snorting with indignation at what has happened to this man. I believe that it offends Jesus' sense of justice that this man was not welcome and that he had been cast aside by the religious leaders of his day. It was offensive that he did not fit in the society. It was offensive that not only the culture but the church rejected the man outright. This made Jesus, I dare say, snorting mad! It got his dander up.

And it should ours. You see, that is where our healing of this world, even our healing of people begins. It begins with that offense to the justice of it all. We ought to be both moved with pity and snorting mad too at the way in which people are overlooked, passed by, and passed over.

Not only are people passed over, passed by, and overlooked—we are the ones who are doing it. Oh, that should grab our attention and that should get us. We should catch ourselves here—that our compassion is so shallow that we tend to have more pity for lost kittens and abandoned dogs than we do hurting neighbors and the children of this age.

Healing starts—Step One—by your being attuned and attentive to the need and also to the nature that the very existence of that need is an affront to the justice and mercy that God intends for the creation. To heal the world—Step One—open your heart to others and do not be afraid to allow them in and even to be indignant about the affront to justice that the hurting, rejected, impaired, lost, passed over and passed by face today.

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**So, “moved with pity” or snorting mad, Mark 1:42 says, “Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him...” Notice that, hear it again—
“Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him...”**

He stretched out his hand and touched him! He was a leper. For Jesus to do that he made himself ritually unclean. He was not allowed to touch him. It was not only conventional wisdom—it was the standard, it was the expectation. You do not touch lepers! You do not do it. You do not get your hands that dirty!

“Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him...”

You can call it Step Two if you want to...but that is where it is at. He was willing to get his hands dirty. And he did it.

You want to make a difference. You want to heal this world. You want to heal someone next to you. You want to help; you want to be helped. You want to be in this Gospel—in this healing that God appoints us to in Holy Spirit—that you have been called to and equipped for....well, oh yes, then you have to get your hands dirty.

You have to be involved. You have let go of the insulation around you that never lets anybody in and does not share even your own struggle—this is messy business. And it stretches us. It pulls us. Sometimes it yanks us in ways that we would never choose or dare to go. But it stretches us to get in and get our hands dirty. Such faithfulness isn’t passive—it is strenuous exercise.

It stretches us to see that participation with the hurting, the needy, the painful—is participation in the presence and reality of the living that Christ that is in us and of us. Oh, “Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him.”

Stretch out your hand....don't wait until you feel whole or healed yourself. God in the living Holy Spirit has given you all you need already—you have enough power in you—it's the power of God in you—stretch out your hand and touch. Touch that one. Touch that someone.

“Moved with pity,” and snorting with indignation, “Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him,” and then he said to the man who was kneeling and begging before him and proclaiming that Jesus had the ability to heal him if he so chose—Jesus, touching him, says, “I do choose. Be made clean.”

“I do choose.” And there it is. We have a choice. We have a choice today, and we have a choice tomorrow, and we have a choice each and every day and every moment of all those days. We have a choice. We can choose to be the presence and power of God in this world or we can stay isolated and in that shell of asking over and over again, “well what about me?” And, “I want it my way.”

“I do choose,” Jesus says to the man.

Do choose. Choose to be let loose that Holy Spirit in you that is longing for you to pray over and reach out and touch that one that you come near today and this week who needs you so much. Sometimes that one will be obvious, sometimes you will have to have your eyes and heart open. Choose.

Choose to reach out and touch. Choose to kiss the leper clean. Choose to love the you that you hide inside. Choose to follow the one who has called you by name and appointed you that you should bear fruit in this age.

“I do choose.” That is what Jesus has said to you and of you. He has come to you with that very healing spirit and he invites you to say it to his children. He invites you to enact it in your touch. He invites you to feel it in your snorting indignation at the injustice of this day. “I do choose.”

**So filled with joy. So much so, that he could not contain it. That is where this choice leads. So filled with joy. Look at what became of the man. You could not silence him. He could not help but tell what Jesus had done in his life. That is the result—so filled with joy. “I do choose.”
Amen.**