

A SERMON PREACHED BY THE REVS. L. KEITH & PATRICIA A. T. PITTSNOGLE
Epiphany 6 – February 12, 2012
Pine Street & Christ Evangelical Lutheran Churches, Danville & Milton, Pennsylvania
TEXT: 2 Kings 5:1-14

The woman had had ENOUGH of his bickering, criticizing, and general nastiness. When she thought she had yelled out all the energy she had in her, she stomped down the stairs, then out to the pile of wood waiting beside the basement door.

She wanted to sling it all over the yard – but instead, she began stacking it with eternal fury. Enough! Enough! She cried out to the Lord, again and again.

The children didn't know what to do. One by one, they joined their mom in her flinging task – picking up log after log after log – helpless to know how to make their parents' lives easier. Eventually, their Dad joined them, and there they were – angry and helpless and angry again.

The youngest child spoke first. He said, “At least we're doing something together as a family.”

It was too much for Mom to bear. She felt all her angry energy welling up into laughter – healing, WONDERFUL laughter. When she fell down on the ground in hysteria, the children

joined, one by one, until all of them were laughing and they no longer focused on the trouble that brought them there. The little child had led them to a good moment they could share.

That's a story I'm sure I've shared with many of you – it's my story. I was the angry woman in control, led to a healing place by my little son (who is now 30 years old). Even though my first marriage ultimately ended in divorce, this is a story to which I return, again and again, when I think about God's healing places in my life.

It's a story that fits so well today with Naaman – great commander of an army in the country of Aram – who finds himself very helpless and vulnerable, up against a terrible situation in his life. He has contracted leprosy, a term used in the Bible to describe any number of serious skin diseases that were cause to send a person away from the community – to live in isolation until healing and purification could bring you back.

Naaman had possession of a young slave girl he had captured from the land of Israel in one of his army's great raids. She served Naaman's wife. In the midst of this great warrior's suffering with leprosy, it was this young girl who pointed Naaman to the place where God could give him healing. "If only he would see the prophet in Samaria! He would cure him!"

But that was way too easy for Naaman – even way too “common.” A great warrior like him would need much more powerful attention. So he told the King of Aram what she had said. Surely the king would know best how to handle this. And the King of Aram sent an entourage of wealth to support him on his journey to meet up with the king of Israel (yes – the land from which the young girl came). Naaman expected the King of Israel would answer his king’s request for healing with high honors – even special privilege! And what happened instead? The King of Israel suspected it was an action of antagonism. Surely, this King of Aram wants to pick another quarrel with me!

But the prophet this young girl knew was Elisha – great teacher, healer, protégé of the amazing prophet Elijah, whose power and presence was Israel’s sign of God’s return in majesty. He heard of Naaman’s agony, and tells the king to send him right away.

But not in humility, of course, does this great warrior approach the healer. When Elisha sends a mere messenger to announce God’s healing prescription, Naaman is highly offended – spouting words of status – certain that the water this messenger called him to wash in could not EVER be as wonderful as the water back home! It was RIDICULOUS for him to obey such

nonsense! Even the suffering of leprosy was not worth this paltry behavior! And he turned away – in a rage – totally put out that Elisha could not give him appropriately honorable attention.

Don't we want that, too? Don't we want to be in charge of our well-being and think only the finest doctors and the best medicine in the most sanitary medical centers are worthy of OUR healing? God forbid that a prophet would call US to simply wash in the Susquehanna River to be restored to health and community! What do this slave girl and this messenger – two MEAGER people in society – have to do with this great warrior's well-being?

Ah....so do I remember, Lord, the power of my anger and righteousness. Certainly you would rain down amazing signs – miraculous appearances – ANGEL wings!

Yet Naaman, like me, would soon learn that God would send even another “meager” person in his life to bring his healing. His own servant sees Naaman's rage and he quietly questions, “Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult – or, as he tries to explain, more ‘amazing’ than this river wash – wouldn't you do it? All he said was ‘wash – be clean’!”

And there – Naaman found his healing place. Not on a woodpile, laughing away the anger – but watching his own flesh grow clean again – restored to health, community, and returned to

power at the hand of three insignificant people who were willing to offer themselves in God's journey with Naaman. "At least you're better," we might hear their lowly voices proclaim.

We never know the ways God may choose to come to us in our given broken places in life – but one thing's for sure. We can count on God using the people we least expect. We may go to the fanciest caregivers on earth, receive the highest-quality care – but you can be sure that behind those faces are countless ones who run machines, kiss their moms or dads or husbands or wives goodbye in the morning and do the things every day that help us. Even when a pill does what 7 washes in a local river once did for a great army commander...you can bet there is a quiet, faithful servant counting those pills, ordering medical supplies, or listening to a caregiver's laments about why he or she can't seem to find the answers they need.

Pay attention to the ones God sends in your life. Allow yourselves to hear the ones who speak God's grace, especially in those times when you can't or won't hear it for yourselves.

It's the way to healing, commander Naaman. It's the way God gives you what you need, children of God.

It's the innocent, life-giving words and actions that feed you with God's wonderful promise of life – even as we struggle and wait to journey through all the pain that comes to us now on our way to eternal life.

Amen.