

## Sermon – February 12, 2012 (2 Kings 5:1-14 & Mark 1:40-45)

“Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favour with his master...” Thus saith Second Kings.

“A leper came to [Jesus] begging him, and kneeling...” Thus saith the Gospel According to Mark.

Black and white, isn't it? The successful versus the not so successful—the great versus the not so great—the favoured versus the unfavoured. Right?

But wait. Hold on for a moment. Not so fast!

Second Kings goes on to say, “[Naaman], though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. Does that not even things out—at least a touch?

The story continues. “...the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife.” And the young girl says to his wife, “If only my lord [Naaman] were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.”

As the story goes—Naaman tells HIS lord what the girl had said and the king says, “Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel.”

Naaman follows the instructions given. He takes the letter to the king of Israel—along with a pretty decent supply of silver, gold and sets of garments. The letter reads like this: “When this... reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant...that you may cure him of his leprosy.”

The king on the receiving end freaks out! He tears his clothes and says, “Am I god, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?” He’s of the opinion that the author—the king of Aram—is attempting to pick a fight with him.

When Elisha—the man of God—hears of this, he corresponds with the king of Israel, saying, “Why have you torn your clothes? Let [Naaman] come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.”

So—Naaman comes to Elisha’s house—with his horses and chariots—and stops at the entrance. Elisha responds by sending a

messenger to him. And the messenger utters these words: “Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.”

Naaman isn't impressed. Naaman isn't impressed one little bit. He's mad actually, and leaves in a rage saying, “I thought that for me he would surely come out...call on the name of the LORD his God...wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy.”

His servants exclaim 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...was, ‘Wash, and be clean’?”

So—Naaman “...[immerses] himself seven times in the Jordan.” And—“...his flesh [is] restored...and he [is] clean.”

Back to Mark's Gospel. The story goes on to quote the leper as saying, “If you choose, you can make me clean.” And Jesus stretches out his hand, touches him and says, “I do choose. Be made clean.” And immediately, he's cured—good to go—subject to a couple of conditions. First of all, he's to tell no one. And

secondly, he's to follow protocol—to "...show [himself] to the priest, and offer for [his] cleansing what Moses commanded..."

Where do these rules come from? Well, many can be found in the Book of Leviticus. Leviticus 13:45 reads as follows: "The person who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be [long and unkempt]; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.'" And—anyone touching those afflicted becomes unclean as well.

Simply for your information, on the chance you haven't come across it yet—or on the chance you've simply forgotten—leprosy in biblical times was not the Hansen's disease of today. No—in biblical times, ANY disease of the skin was defined as being leprosy. Acne anyone? Have you ever experienced breakouts? Yikes! A scary thought, is it not! :o)

But—have no fear. Being "unclean" wasn't necessarily a life sentence. It wasn't necessarily forever. There were two steps to the cleansing process. First of all, one had to show no symptoms of the disease. Can you say Clearasil? :o) Leviticus 14 documents the rest. One had to be declared clean by a priest. That, being

“declared clean” that is, often involved some form of payment or ritual act.

Back to scripture. To recap, we’re dealing with two happy endings here. Naaman’s flesh is restored...and...the leper is cured. Right?

But wait. What about Jesus? When he reaches out and touches the leper, he commits a real “no-no”. He, according to “the rules”, goes further than he should. He crosses the line so to speak—the boundary—the ritual boundary that is. He too becomes unclean. He too requires cleansing.

Interesting stories. Interesting stories, are they not? But—what relevance do they hold for us today—if any?

I believe there’s some. I believe there’s relevance. I believe there’s something to be learned.

Let’s look at Second Kings first.

Ironically, the king of Israel doesn’t seem to know what the captive young girl in Damascus does—that there’s a prophet in Samaria who could perform the miracle. He sees the impossibility

of the case only—she its possibility. And, all greatness and pride aside, Naaman listens to the advice of his servants.

Please take note. The individuals HERE who bring healing are not those in positions of power or wealth—but the servants—the servant girl of Naaman’s wife and the servants of Naaman who convince him to “wash” in the Jordan. Ultimately, Naaman’s healed because he trusts them and listens to their advice.

Now—let’s look at Mark.

“I do choose,” says Jesus, “Be made clean!” Jesus knew the rule. He knew what he was supposed to do—or better stated—what he wasn’t supposed to do. But he made a conscious decision to do what was right. He reached out and touched.

The man whom Jesus heals then disobeys HIS command to “...say nothing to anyone” and to “...go, show yourself to the priest...”, etcetera. He, instead, chooses to proclaim what Jesus has done. He’s no dummy. He recognizes where the power lies.

It can be hard to stand up for what is right. But, as followers of Christ, we're called to make choices. We're called to make choices—with Christ as our lens.

My friends, let it be known, God, in order to carry out work essential to be completed, labours in humble places and through humble people. No one exemplifies that better than Jesus himself—one of extremely humble beginnings.

Healing can come in unexpected places—in foreign countries—in public places—as in today's passages.

Healing, my friends, is a gift. It's not a reward. God's love does not discriminate. God's healing presence is for all.

May it be so for us today—and in each and every day to come.

Amen.