

C Lectionary 14 7.7.19

2 Kings 5:1-14; Psalm 66:1-9; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Focus Statement: Come and see what God has done.

Every week when I'm wrestling with the texts I'm to preach on, I try to come up with a short focus sentence to build the sermon around. The focus statement for this week's sermon comes from verse five of the psalm we just read, "Come and see what God has done."

During the summer, the Old Testament text and the Gospel text aren't chosen to purposely pair with each other. But once again this week, I was struck by how both texts seem to be addressing opposite sides of the same question. Because from the way I read it, both of these texts are addressing finding God at work in places you don't expect.

In our Old Testament reading, we heard about Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, "a great man" and "a mighty warrior." Yet despite his high position, Naaman had a problem. The text translated the Hebrew as leprosy, but it could have been any number of skin conditions. Whatever it was, such a condition would have meant that Naaman was ritually unclean and unable to engage in society. Naaman learned from one of his servants that Elisha, the prophet of Israel, could cure him, so he set out with "ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments." So, in other words, in addition to being a great warrior and an esteemed commander, Naaman was also super wealthy. But when he showed up at the home of the prophet with all this great tribute behind him, the prophet wouldn't even come out to greet him. Instead, Elisha sent a messenger to tell Naaman to wash in the Jordan seven times, and he will become clean.

To which Naaman became offended. Yes, Naaman seems a bit ungrateful and melodramatic here, but think about the sort of treatment he was probably used to, and the sort of tribute he was bringing. One can't really blame him for expecting maybe a little bit better treatment. And then there's the whole question of the Jordan. Since the Jordan is like "the river" in the Bible, we know the significance of it. But here's the thing about the Jordan, as rivers go, it's not all that impressive. Especially down near Jerusalem where Naaman would have been, the Jordan is small, brown, and muddy. As a proud Syrian, Naaman would have known the quality of his own country's rivers, the mighty Abana and Pharpar. Rivers that would have dwarfed the muddy little Jordan.

But what Naaman missed here is that healing doesn't come from the prophet nor does healing come from the river. Healing comes from God. And I want to walk a fine line here, because I'm not saying that Naaman's pride or unwillingness to follow Elisha's words in any way impeded his healing. If you're dealing with some sort of a chronic illness, and healing doesn't seem to be coming in the way you want or hope, I promise you that God is not withholding healing from you until you accomplish some random task, because that's simply not how God works. The point of this story is that God was at work in a different way and in a different place than Naaman expected. And, that healing, God's healing, came in a different, and in fact an easier and more giving way than Naaman expected. The point of the story is that Naaman didn't need to impress the prophet with his power, buy off the prophet with his wealth, or accomplish some great task in order to earn healing. All Naaman needed was to receive the gift of God's healing. We see this summed up in the

words to Naaman from his servants, “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 that’s Naaman, discovering healing isn’t something he had to earn. Then we’ve got Luke, and Jesus who “after this... appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.” Let’s remember really quick what “this” this sending is after. Last week we heard about how “when the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up... he sent messengers ahead of him... to a village of the Samaritans... but they did not receive him.” And the disciples response to the Samaritans’ failure of hospitality was, shall we say, not awesome. “When his disciples, James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” Now, whether or not James and John actually had that kind of power, or if they were speaking metaphorically, or were just super full of themselves, we don’t know. The point is, come on guys. At what point up to now has “calling down fire to consume” someone been Jesus’ go-to solution to resistance? So before sending out the seventy, Jesus first gave them some very specific instructions. “Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals... Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide... Do not move from house to house. Whenever you enter a town... eat what is set before you, cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’”

This text is about hospitality, but like Naaman’s experience with Elisha, it is not a text about giving hospitality, it is a text about receiving it. The lesson Jesus was teaching his disciples

here is maybe the hardest lesson for we who are doers and servers to learn, it is the lesson of how to let others serve you. What this text required of the seventy was to realize that, yes, they had something really really valuable, they had the good news of the kingdom of God. But the people to whom they were bringing this good news, those people had something of value as well. And it's not complex math to realize if I share what I have, that's great, we'll each have some. But if we both bring something, we end up with twice as much. In fact, in the wonky economy of God we probably end up with even more than that, for God has a tricky way of multiplying things, there's really no other way to explain the feeding of the five-thousand, or potlucks.

And what if the seventy weren't welcomed? What if, like the experience of the messengers to the Samaritan village last week, they are not offered hospitality and their presence and message is refused? Pro tip: calling down fire to consume them is still not the answer. Rather instead, simply wipe the dust from your feet and move on. "Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near." That's the sneaky, subversive power of the kingdom of God. It comes near. Not because of the seventy's message or the village's hospitality, but simply because drawing near to God's people is what the kingdom of God does. Sometimes it takes time, and sometimes the first messenger is not the one who will carry the message, but none of this stops the coming of the kingdom of God. We know from the book of Acts, and, like I've said before, from our very presence here today, two thousand years and thousands upon thousands of miles away, that the message did in fact get shared. So come and see, not what God needs for you to do, but what God is already doing, what God has already done. The kingdom of God has come near. Thanks be to God. Amen.