

July 3, 2022
Communion

2 Kings 5:1-14

“Faithful Independence”

This Sunday of the fourth of July weekend is dedicated to both observance of national pride and family connection. So, on this weekend where we worship as God’s children and celebrate the declaration of our intent to be a nation – let’s look at this **dance of power, nation and faith** which is part of our lives.

Our text today is perfect for such an examination because in it we have the blending *of political reality with the surprising life of God*. The central character here is a man who knows about **both military and political power**. Scripture says God blessed Naaman’s efforts on behalf of the enemies of Israel. Which would have been confusing to those who believed God helped Israel defeat their enemies. This is our first clue to **be careful to equate earthly power with faith** – national identity with God.

Naaman really is at the top of the world. Successful in his work, trusted by the King, wealthy, and loved by his family. What more could you want? **But there is always another edge of the sword**. *You don’t know anyone for whom everything has gone well in life with no drawbacks*. Human life doesn’t come in that flavor. And for Naaman, the painful and discouraging place in his life was his skin disease. Every culture in the ancient near east looked down on those with skin diseases. They looked bad, smelled bad, and could be communicable.

Naaman must have been a good man because the first twist in our story comes from a slave girl taken on a raid from Israel. She tells Naaman’s wife – whose servant she now is – that there is help to be had for his embarrassing problem with the prophet in Samaria – who is Elisha. This first turn of events is the clue for reading and understanding the whole story. *A powerful man who has the world by the tail is unable to help himself. But the grace of God appears from a source with none of the advantages Naaman has*. A young girl who is the picture of vulnerability is the key to Naaman finding the connection to God he needs.

As the story proceeds – we see Naaman and the king who honors him and even the king of Israel all act as if it is business as usual. Perhaps we as humans have trouble doing anything other than *what we have always done*. As the tale **unfolds**

powerful people swagger and expect the world to give them what they want – and God works through those who have no power or are unimpressed.

When Naaman finally gets to Elisha's house, the prophet won't go out to meet him. He is unimpressed by Naaman's entourage and won't put on a show. All Naaman's expectations are shattered. We may not understand that Elisha has slighted Naaman, but Naaman does. He is an important powerful man who is used to people showing him respect. Yet, he is beginning to suspect he has traveled all this way for nothing. This is clearer in the Hebrew with the way "**me**" is emphasized in the sentence, "*I thought that for me he would surely come out and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God...*"

And then, as at the beginning of the story – we have *those who are without power* saving the day. Naaman's servants calm him down by pointing out there is no need to hurry to cut off his nose to spite his face. In truth the request wasn't all that simple – probably a 40-mile trip on horseback without an easy direct route – and he would be retracing some of his steps to go to the Jordan river. But Naaman agrees that – compared to what he hopes to get in return and all he is willing to give to be healed of his disease – it would be worth it.

After dipping in the Jordan seven times, Naaman believes in the God who healed him. Notice **God's grace preceded any recognition from Naaman**. It isn't that Naaman paid God's price and got a miracle. God's grace overwhelmed his life and Naaman was carried along with it.

Do you remember Naaman's story? Jesus ticked people off by pointing out that there were a lot of people in Israel whom Elisha didn't bother to heal – but he did heal this foreigner. They were so mad they wanted to kill Jesus – without caring it was true. We are celebrating our national life and today's story acknowledges our national life matters – and **life with God is of a whole different order**. Naaman was the kind of guy that God's people in Israel loved to hate. And **he is the recipient of God's grace**. Powerful people populate this story – and it is the captive child and the servants who give **what is needed for life**. Independence is demonstrated through *faithful dependence upon God* – not the assertion of cultural power. Let's practice faithful independence – remembering God's life makes all life worthwhile – and God's power brings healing and reconciliation to the messiness of lives segregated by human power.