

ALL SAINTS WEEK
OCT 31/NOVEMBER 3/4, 2018

1ST LUTHERAN, MARSHALL
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

II KINGS 5:1-15a; MATTHEW 8:2-3

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

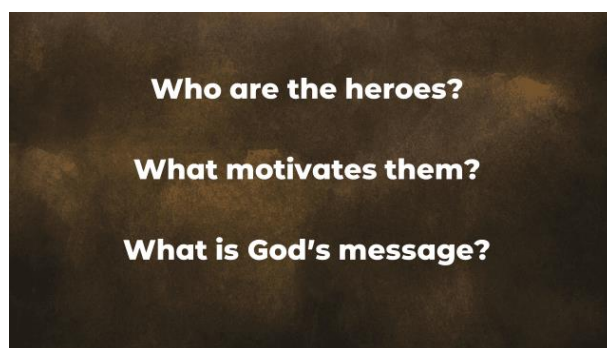
Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

On the screens are the 3 questions I asked you to think about while I'm telling the story:

Who are the heroes?

What motivates them?

What's the message that God wants us to hear?



Naaman is a very powerful man, a general who is greatly favored by the king of Aram (what is modern day Syria), because he just led Aram's army to victory over Israel in a very recent war...

Yet, though he's at the top of his game politically and militarily...He's also teetering on the brink of absolute disaster.

As you know, Naaman is also the victim of that terrible disease called leprosy = from which, *at that time*, there was **NO CURE**. And not only was it a sentence of death, but it also carried with it a terrible, lingering, debilitating period of suffering before its victims took their final breath.

He and his family were despairing, for there was...no hope...no hope, that is, until...a young, powerless, foreign slave girl dared to open her mouth and speak a word of faith.



This nameless **slave** girl of Naaman's wife, had been taken from her family, from her country, and from her religion in Naaman's victory over the Israelites.

And yet, either she is, as Jesus would say several hundred years later of the soon-to-be-disciple Nathanael, *an Israelite in whom there is no guile* (John 1:47)...; OR she has developed a deep and abiding affection or at least **respect** for her new masters...; OR she truly has a sense of God's loving grace for all people...

This is how desperate Naaman is to be healed...he receives this slave girl's words with a passionate sense of hope as if he had just visited the famous Oracle of Delphi... She's not a doctor, she's not an academic, she's not even a wise, elderly neighbor...but this powerful man grasps this powerless girl's offering as tightly as if it were a lifeline thrown to a person who is drowning in the ocean.

*I'm fascinated by this little slave girl who has no **name**, but...who appears have a deep and abiding faith, as well as a ferocious fearlessness when speaking from weakness to strength, from vulnerability to potency, from powerlessness to power. Or...maybe it's the fact that she has simply been chosen to be a mouthpiece of the almighty God in whom she believes. Go to the prophet in Samaria, she says, and offers her plea with the ultimate confidence of a believing child with these amazing words: **He will heal you.***

Naaman, who is at the end of his rope, grabs hold of her words – as if his life depends on it (which it does!!). And, emboldened by her confidence, immediately he seeks permission from his king to visit this mighty prophet of God. His king agrees, even writes to the king of Samaria asking him – commanding him – to help his general find healing.

Needless to say, the Israelite king is anything but happy with the request. Still recovering from the last war against Aram which they lost, he suddenly worries that his former enemy is trying to pick another fight – and with such an impossible request. *Am I God?* he cries, *able to cure a man of his leprosy??*

The answer that's obvious to everyone, is **of course not!!!** However, though the **king** may not know God, *Elisha* hears of the outburst and bids Naaman be sent to him, that all might learn of God's prophet in Israel.

So Naaman loads up his chariots with gold and presents, then charges off to Samaria. He arrives breathless, yet optimistic; weary, yet eager; sick, but hoping against hope that *soon, and very soon...* he will be healed.

Yet...things don't exactly unfold the way that he had expected. The great prophet Elisha...doesn't even get off the couch, let alone come out of his house to greet the man. In fact, he sends his **servant** out with a message for great warrior, Namaan...

Isn't that amazing? One of the most significant occasions between these two nations, probably the most powerful man that Elisha would ever meet, the most amazing opportunity to bask in the glory of his – and God's – blessing of healing... and Elisha sends his *servant* to speak to this warrior, this general, this man of worldly power...

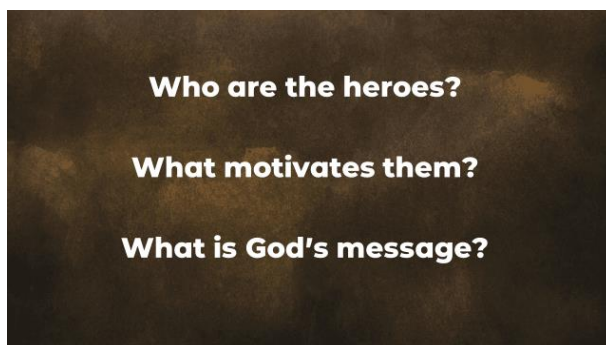
*I'm fascinated by that **servant** who has no name, but...who appears to have a deep and abiding faith, or at least a ferocious fearlessness when speaking from weakness to strength, from vulnerability to potency, from powerlessness to power. Or...maybe it's the fact that he has simply been chosen to be a mouthpiece of the almighty God in whom he believes. Go wash in the Jordan river 7 times, he tells the great and powerful man, and you will be clean.*

Now this is the warrior, the hero, the general who is used to being the one to **give** commands...and Naaman feels affronted. *Who does Elisha think he is???* Not only does the prophet not greet him personally, he also rubs salt in the general's wounds by sending out his minion, and with a ridiculous prescription to boot: bathe in the muddy waters of the little Jordan river (I'm picturing our own little Redwood river here in the dog days of summer, right??)!! With an outburst of frustration and disgust, the general prepares to mount up and head out... and...go...try...**something...anything** else???

I'm fascinated by the man's servants who have no name, but...who appear to have a deep and abiding faith, or at least a ferocious fearlessness when speaking from weakness to strength, from vulnerability to potency, from powerlessness to power. Or maybe it's the fact that they have simply been chosen to be a mouthpiece of the almighty God.

These servants, who knew his temper well, dare to speak to him, dare to challenge him, dare to ask him to change his mind. They say, *If the prophet had asked you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? So why not do what's simple...?*

I can just picture him standing there, torn in two directions... Then, with a shake of his head, a grimace on his face, this great man who's dying of a greatly feared and unforgiving disease...relents, does what he's told, bathes 7 times...in that muddy little river...and emerges from its dirty waters...completely clean, completely healed, completely whole.



Once again, the questions we're asking are:

Who are the heroes in this story?

What motivates them?

What's the message that God wants us to hear?

It's possible that the heroes of this story are those who are in power. We're talking NAAMAN, the KINGS of Aram and Samaria, and even the prophet ELISHA.

Again, **Namaan** is that powerful, popular general who has commanded an army and victoriously defeated his enemy.

The Kings of Aram and Israel are, well, kings...they're obviously top players in their worldly games...but they're ALSO typical politicians, right: one is *clueless*

and the other is *suspicious*...what's amazing is how *unaware* they are of **God's** presence in life - they have no clue who to go to themselves!

Elisha is probably the best candidate of the three powerful candidates – and yet, at his moment of glory, his Broadway debut, his role as the starting pitcher for the God Squad in what truly was the World Series of faith, he decides to take a nap, or read a book, or make something to eat while his servant does the hard work.

So who do you think are the heroes in the story and what motivates them?



For me, it's those people with *no worldly power*: a slave girl, Elisha's servant, and Naaman's servants. Ordinary people just like you and me: optimistic youth, the wizened elderly, and everyone in between.

Certainly, without Elisha, the Kings and Naaman, there would be no story. But neither would there be a story without:

- a brave and compassionate slave girl,
- the **servant** of the prophet Elisha who had to face the potential wrath of Naaman by telling the mighty warrior to *go jump in a lake* (river!)
- or Naaman's brave and compassionate servants, who had to talk their master down from the ledge and out of letting his anger and pride ruin his chance for life.

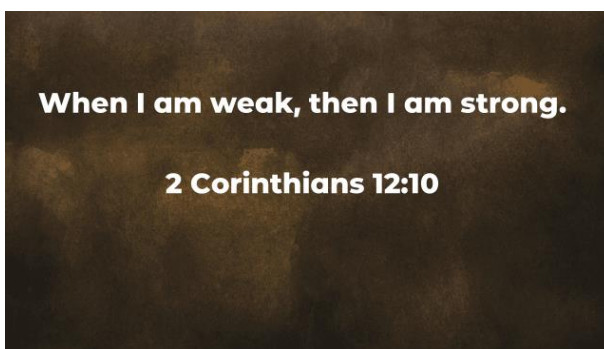
Don't you think **this** is the message that God wants us to take to heart? Over and over again, it is in and through **ordinary** people that God seems to want to work. So far this fall, we've heard about:

- God's promise to **old** Abraham and Sarah to bless the world; and then
- God's call to the **young** boy **Joseph** to save Egypt and his family.
- We've seen **mighty Pharaoh** take a **mighty fall**, and
- the young king **Solomon** pray for wisdom.

That's the power of God's compassion in your life and in mine. Always and everywhere, God knows when people are suffering. And always and everywhere, God works to bless them/us and give us hope.

Every once in a while, God's help comes as a complete surprise – like a shot out of the blue! But most of the time, God works through people...like you and me, and a little Israelite slave girl, and those servants who were loyal to their masters: Elisha and Naaman.

It reminds me of that amazing verse written by the Apostle Paul in 2nd Corinthians. Says the servant of God, "When I am weak, then I am strong."



Essentially he's saying that when we finally give up trying to work out God's will on our own, that's when God can finally start working in – and through us – to bless the world.

It's a true blessing to belong to a family – and to a family of faith! It's a true blessing to have people who love us, whom we can love and care for. So it is that God calls each of us to show compassion to all of God's children – at home, in school, on the playground, at work, in the stores – and on the street corners.

Trust that God is committed to showing love and compassion to you...and Trust that God is committed to choosing to speak **through** you heaven's words of love and truth **to** your neighbors, so that **all** people might come to know the Lord as a God of love and grace. Amen.