

God is still speaking...through companions of all kinds

Psalm 42, 2 Kings 5:1-14

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It takes a village, right? Not only to raise a child, but simply to be a human being in the world. We cannot navigate our lives alone, much as we Americans uphold the ideal of the independent person.

Take a moment and think of everyone who made your life more livable already this morning. Hold those folks in your mind.

Today we are remembering Naaman, someone very powerful who needed people he could never have imagined needing in his life. We are told simply, in the history of the Kings of Israel, that he was a great man. Five-star general in the army of the Arameans. Lots of medals. But he had some kind of skin disease, and he was desperate for a cure. That Psalm we heard today might have expressed the depth of his despair, although he would have addressed it to the gods the Arameans worshipped.

We imagine he saw all kinds of Aramean healers, tried the local folk remedies, prayed to the various gods of the people of Aram, but nothing worked.

Now, into his home, comes a Hebrew child who had been captured and taken as a slave for his wife. Certainly, one would imagine that the only way she was part of his village is that she did hot and sweaty work in his household. He probably didn't even know her name.

And yet, something in her rose up, and she suggested a possibility for a cure. A child, an enslaved child at that. Why would she care, and why would anyone pay attention to her? And yet, she cared as a fellow human being, and his wife payed attention, and Naaman attended to his wife, and so he approached the King of

Aram to ask for a letter of introduction to the King of Israel so that he might seek healing.

His village expands to the King, and to the servants Naaman took with him on his journey. The King of Israel receives him but not with welcome, thinking he was coming to bring an excuse for Aram to make war on Israel.

But Elisha heard about this. Elisha, prophet for Israel, believer in the one God, and servant to God. Because of this, Elisha understood that God was not just the God of Israel, not their property or under their control, but God who loved peoples far and wide, even those who did not know about that love. So, Elisha reached out to Naaman, an enemy of his people.

At first, Naaman rejected this helper and his simple idea for a cure. But then another companion encouraged him to give it a try, one of his servants. He did, and was cured. But it took a village, and at least half that village was not what Naaman expected it would be.

Naaman's companions to a cure were: a young enslaved Hebrew girl, his wife, the King of Aram, the King of Israel, the Hebrew prophet Elisha, and his personal servants. God spoke to Naaman through people of different ages, genders, social classes, and nationalities. People he might have expected to help (like his wife) and people he never imagined could have anything useful to give him (a child slave, a Hebrew prophet). Finally, of course, a God of whom he knew nothing and did not worship.

Why is this story remembered in the Bible? Surely, Elisha cured many people in Israel, and we read of God acting through him among his own people. Why tell this story generation after generation? Why did this story make the cut when the writer of the history of the Kings of Israel chose what to record? You know how the character of a people is shaped by the history they choose to remember, and the history they choose to forget!

Perhaps it was remembered because it shows a human weakness that spans the whole of human history that moves us toward division rather than unity. Perhaps because the ones who recorded this history, and many stories like it throughout the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament, hope that someone, someday, will get it, that God is the God of all people, and that God brings us together to be for and with each other without regard to those divisions we manufacture, divisions that do not exist, really.

If we were to bring this story into our day and time, we can see that we still love our dividing ways. We excel at dividing people based on a plethora of things that have nothing to do with our capacity to be helpers, a village, for one another. Who knows who might be a companion sent by God to us, or to whom we might be called to be a companion?

I chafe when I hear the President and others in government talk about restricting immigration only to those seen as “useful” to our economy: those already highly skilled or educated. As though no one else could have a part to play in the lives of people in the U.S. Naaman’s story reminds us that all kinds of people can be the hands and voice of God: people with no education, people who are not our religion or race or nationality, people who are not our social class. But no, we take people like that and lock them in cages at the border, put them in camps where they are denied basic needs for life, treat them like they don’t matter.

They do. We all do. Remember how I began asking you to think about who made your life more livable between the time you got up and the time you got here? Now take that a little deeper. Think about those who picked the beans for the coffee or leaves for the tea you had this morning. Who packaged them and drove them to the store? Who made the sheets on your bed or the clothes on your back? Take a minute and think about them.

Friends, we need to become a great force in this land to say with our words and our lives that God can speak and act through anyone and everyone, and often does! I really mean we have to be loud about this because the voices that say otherwise are stronger now. And, especially, to counter the voices who write and say and post and tweet that God only speaks and acts through very certain kinds of people, and odds are you are not them unless you are a straight white non-disabled guy who believes very specific things. We need to be careful not to fall in to the **fear** of thinking that way, clear in understanding what we believe, and to have stories like Naaman to back it up. Stories like Ruth and Naomi. Stories like Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Stories like Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. If you don't know these stories, google them, then read in your Bible. If you don't have a Bible, let me know and I'll get you one.

God's messengers of healing, help, and hope often come in unexpected packages; our village is bigger than we even know. Maybe you are that person who makes life more livable for someone. Maybe someone unexpected is one of those who does that for you. Don't be like Naaman and turn away before a blessing. Let us explore our village more thoroughly, and then remember those unexpected ones who bring us blessings. Amen.