

The Sunday Missive – July 3, 2022
The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 544 Jesus shall reign

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
'Til moons shall wax and wane no more.

People and realms of every tongue
Dwell on his love with sweetest song;
And infant voices shall proclaim
Their early blessings on his Name.

Let every creature rise and bring
Peculiar honors to our King;
Angels descend with songs again,
And earth repeat the loud amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FaGhw1ABIWs>

The Collect of the Day

O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbors: grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

2 Kings 5:1-14

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior,

suffered from leprosy. Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. And the king of Aram said, "Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel."

He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy." When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me."

But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel." So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. But his servants approached and said 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 to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

Psalm 30

I will exalt you, O Lord, because you have lifted me up* ***You have not let my enemies triumph over me.***

O Lord my God, I cried out to you* ***And you restored me to health.***

You brought me up, O Lord, from the dead* ***You restored my life as I was going down to the grave.***

Sing to the Lord, all ye servants of his* ***Give thanks for the remembrance of God's holiness.***

For God's wrath endures but the twinkling of an eye* ***But God's favour endures for a lifetime.***

Weeping may endure through the night* ***But joy will come in the morning.***

While I felt secure, I said, "I shall never be disturbed* ***You, Lord, made me as strong as the mountains.***

Then you hid your face and I was filled with fear* ***I cried to you, O Lord; I pleaded with you saying***

"What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the pit?* ***Will the dust praise you or declare your faithfulness?***

Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me* ***O Lord, be my helper.***

You will turn my wailing into dancing* ***You will put off my sackcloth and clothe me with joy.***

Therefore my heart will sing to you without ceasing* ***O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever.***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCfXsP3knk4>

Galatians 6:1-6, 7-16

My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. For all must carry their own loads.

Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher.

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand! It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised-- only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! As for those who will follow this rule-- peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

Hymn 757 Will you come and follow me

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known,
Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you help the blinded see if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean, and do such as this unseen,
And admit to what I mean in you and you in me?

Christ, your summons echoes true when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
In your company I'll go where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WwtJVwHcxw>

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

The Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, 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.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town

that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'

"Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Trust in Me - Proper 9C

We know from the history of Israel that Elisha inherited the mantle of prophecy and healing from Elijah. But for Elisha to fully prove that spiritual power, great things would have to occur. Today we heard about one of them: Naaman, the heroic and revered general of Aram's army has a (potentially, even usually) fatal flaw, he has leprosy. The ancient diseases that our modern word leprosy translates were numerous, not just the bacterial (Hansen's) disease we moderns know as leprosy. But the Levitical Code in the Torah contains precise instructions regulating the stigmatizing treatment of anyone who has a visibly wasting disease, grouped under the name 'leprosy,' and attributable to bad character.

They must be cleansed and renewed and forgiven before they can interact with the rest of society. For us, these stories serve as illustrations, analogies really, of a society's self-care. On this our National Independence Day, we would do well to remind ourselves the same is true of nations as of individuals. Even a powerful man like Naaman, if he has severe, debilitating and contagious flaws, must find a way to be healed of them. Otherwise

he will lose his status, his position, and his life. Naaman hasn't gotten that bad, but of course he doesn't want to. Who does?

Today, we might draw a parallel between this man and current powerful and famous public figures – celebrities, politicians, celebrity-politicians, etc., who wield great power but also have virulent flaws that have resulted in reprehensible – or criminal – behavior, and have done considerable damage to others while the big shots' stars were ascendant. We know that leprosy is medically manageable, but we are also aware of even uglier pathologies. We know that abusers of wealth and power who go unchecked do more damage than anybody. But this is not so much a lesson about boundary violations or abuse of power, as it is about how the most powerful among us can be badly flawed. The kind of disease Naaman had was seemingly incurable, progressive and fatal. So it is with today's megalomaniacs.

In this tale, the problem is accompanied by its solution. A radical change of attitude and behavior on Naaman's part, specifically, asking for help from someone who has no apparent power or standing, ends up saving him from fatal decline. Elisha's power – as that of all great prophets – is to show Naaman the way.

Thus, Naaman: Power, prestige, wealth and pride, but itchy. He's got an itch he just can't scratch. Most of us can relate, one way or another; there is so much that is beyond our control. Not too long ago, I spent a couple of years with a cancerous itch I could not scratch by myself. With the help of immensely learned folks and almost unimaginable technology, it seems to have gone away for now, but only after I put myself in their hands and consented to have unspeakably humbling – and uncomfortable – scratching done to my old corpus. With thanks to Science for the means of healing, with thanks to all the people involved in supporting, transporting, and caring about and for me, giving me the opportunity to heal, and with thanks to God for the motivation to be well, my itch got scratched for me.

Likewise, somehow, the great Naaman is able to hear the still small voice that tells him, "There is one who can help you." Bear in mind, it can be a far greater challenge for a big shot to hear a little voice than for the rest of us. So his story takes on extra intensity. That he allows the advice of a captive serving girl to affect and guide him is miraculous in and of itself.

Naaman serves a king. And this king is a big king. He's so big that he orders other littler kings around. The big king dashes off a letter to a littler king saying, "Take care of my man, Naaman." And Naaman sets off for the littler king's kingdom - Israel -- where the healing is supposed to take place.

What follows are a couple of brief comedy sketches. Storytellers clearly enjoy the discomfort and folly of powerful people. The Israelite king freaks out because he thinks he's being tricked into a quarrel with the Aramean king, who may be looking for an excuse to overthrow him. Big kings do such things. He doesn't even consider the possibility of trying to help Naaman at first. Luckily, Elisha convinces him otherwise.

Then when Naaman hears the treatment that Elisha prescribes as a cure, he has a temper tantrum of his own. "This is stupid! Our rivers are just as good back home; who is this person who's ordering me to go swimming!?"

In each case, cooler, humbler heads prevail and the big shots are talked down from their self-righteous - and self-destructive -- ledges. Elisha agrees to look into Naaman's problem for the king, and Naaman's servants calm their master down. They put things into perspective for him and save him from himself: if he wants to be healed, he'd better cooperate. Sure enough, into the drink he goes, all leprous and miserable, and out he comes just lovely, ready to audition for Ivory Soap. He is cured.

We don't get a formula, or an explanation of why this big shot is able to hear the small voices that lead to his salvation. We only

know that he does listen and, when he listens it makes all the difference in his life. One clear message is that the wisdom of the peripheral and powerless can guide the great and powerful. Perhaps not a clear formula, but we do get some clues about to bring about healing change, how Naaman becomes able, not only to 'scratch the unscratchable itch,' but remove the itch entirely. First the captive servant girl has him humble himself – no easy feat for a cat like Naaman.

And Elisha – oh the gall, the chutzpah! He doesn't even come out of his house to see Naaman. He sends a messenger out instead to talk to him. Major diss. "Tell him to go swimming'. Tell Naaman to go jump in a lake – ok a river. But it's just Elisha's way of sparking humility in the General, and so perhaps we can conclude that it is at least partly the humility itself that cleanses, heals and saves him – from the inside out. It must have been something to see this big, powerful guy get down, get naked, get in the river and be transformed.

His flesh was restored to that of a young boy. Oh the delight of that sense memory – how it feels to kiss the cheeks and trumpet the belly of your soft little fellow (after a bath, of course, when all the jelly and spaghetti sauce and goodness knows what-all else are washed away!) It is a sublime experience to be the kisser of such a one, and the story is telling us that it is very much a miraculous state to be that kissable one too. Naaman is made new by his humility.

He is made new and his priorities change. "Now I know there is no God other than the God of Israel." That's his new story and he's sticking to it. As the proverb says, "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and humility goes before honor." So it is now with Naaman. Fear (as in respect) for God supercedes all other obligations and hierarchies. And only through humility is his new, true honor attained. First things first. If I've got an itch I can't scratch, go to the people around me who know and ask for their suggestions. And if there aren't any around, find some. Pretty good

turnaround for a guy who's used to throwing soldiers and shekels and letters from kings at his problems.

Blessed are the meek, says Jesus, for this very reason. This doesn't mean anything like letting ourselves be doormats or martyrs or pushovers. It does mean putting people in our lives whom we truly admire and trust, and then taking their suggestions once in awhile.

Naaman's trusted servants ask him, "If the prophet had asked you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? All he asked you to do was go swimming! Sure, it's a risk. He might be standing there naked, getting in and out of the Jordan seven times and only getting wet. But he takes the risk, humbles himself and gets a lot more than wet, he gets well.

So, Naaman. Able? Yes. Ablest man in all of Aram. Ready? Absolutely. He goes down to Israel ready for anything, coffers full and highly motivated – sick and tired of having an itch he can't scratch. But is he willing? For the longest time, no. He has too much political, financial and professional power. He has too many chariots and too much money – too many closets full of clothes.

Likewise we, when we celebrate the birthday of our nation; when we sing of the beauty of this land of ours and the great promise of our national experiment, it is utterly vital that we put ourselves in Namaan's frame of mind, and know that we are not able to heal ourselves by ourselves; that our song must be a plea for help, for brotherhood, for grace; that our crown must be a crown, not of triumph but of justice, and all our victories in the name of nurture and peace.

Hymn 719 America the Beautiful

O beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain;
For purple mountain majesties above the fruited plain!
America! America! God shed His grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea!

O beautiful for heroes proved in liberating strife,
Who more than self their country loved, and mercy more than life!
America! America! God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control, thy liberty in law.

O beautiful for patriot dream that sees beyond the years
Thine alabaster cities gleam, undimmed by human tears!
America! America! God shed his grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FXN1Z6Q004>

Hymn 778 We all are one in mission

We all are one in mission, we all are one in call,
Our varied gifts united by Christ, the Lord of all.
A single, great commission compels us from above
To plan and work together that all may know Christ's love.

We all are called for service to witness in God's name.
Our ministries are different, our purpose is the same:
To touch the lives of others by God's surprising grace,
So people of all nations may feel God's warm embrace.

We all behold one vision, a stark reality;
The steward of salvation was nailed upon a tree.
Yet resurrected Justice gives rise that we may share
Free reconciliation and hope amid despair.

Now let us be united and let our song be heard.
Now let us be a vessel for God's redeeming Word.
We all are one in mission, we all are one in call,
Our varied gifts united by Christ, the Lord of all.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMA6HdxxJfg>

Jerusalem

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green:
And was the holy Lamb of God,
On England's pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine,
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold:
Bring me my arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England's green & pleasant Land.

William Blake