

2 Kings 5:1-14

I'm a little surprised that anyone came here to church this morning because the "real" church is opening its doors for the first time this week across the river and about ten miles west. Maybe you didn't get the letter in the mail, but about every Lutheran in the city of Washington did—a letter from the new "Lutheran" church inviting them to join them for worship because they, and not the church these Lutherans are presently attending, are the "real" church. But if this new Lutheran church is the real church, what does that make Immanuel Lutheran, and Faith Lutheran, and us? Wouldn't that make us imposters? Wouldn't that make our pastors false teachers? And wouldn't that make our members fools?

Naaman thought he was a fool for agreeing to go see the prophet Elisha. He was excited at first. Naaman was a great man. A Syrian army commander, he had the respect of the people and of his king...but, he was a leper. And so all of his achievements were worthless to him. His conquests, his popularity, his legacy, he would trade them all in a heartbeat for a cure from his leprosy. But there was no cure. Lepers died a slow, painful death lamenting the fact that their disease was incurable.

God, however, had other plans in store for Naaman. A little girl was taken in a raid upon the land of Israel. Her name is known only to God, but we know her as a little Christian who had love for her enemies. As a slave in Naaman's house she told her mistress that there was a prophet in the land of Israel who could cure Naaman's leprosy. Would we do that? Would we have pity on our kidnappers? Would we desire for them, a long, happy life instead of a slow, painful death? This little girl is an example to us. She forgave her captors and she showed genuine love toward them.

And so Naaman is excited. He travels to the land of Israel seeking a cure. He shows up at the Capital City, but the king there knows nothing of a cure for leprosy. Elisha, God's prophet, sends for Naaman to come to his house. Naaman's excitement is building. At last he will be healed. But then the strangest set of occurrences takes place. When Naaman arrives, Elisha does not go out to meet him. He sends out his servant with a message: "Go to the Jordan River and wash seven times, and you will be healed of your leprosy." And now Naaman realizes that he has been a fool. The Jordan River? That creek can hardly be called a river. It's dirty. It's not suitable for bathing. How could those muddy waters cure his leprosy? And seven times? Why, each time he would go in to wash he would come out with more slime and filth than before. Naaman was outraged. He was downright angry. He had come in good faith trusting the word of his servant girl. But now he sees that he was being played for a fool. "I'll go back home," he said, "and wash in the rivers of Damascus. Abana and Pharpar are beautiful rivers. They are real rivers, not imposters like this little creek called the Jordan River."

And Naaman would have left except that God again stepped in. Again through a servant—in Damascus through a little servant girl—and now through his humble traveling servants, God shows mercy to Naaman. Naaman's servants come to him and beg him to do what the prophet says. "It is what Elisha said to you...why not just obey his word?" they plead. And so Naaman goes to the Jordan River and washes seven times and is cured of his leprosy.

You, like Naaman are here in good faith. You did not stay home. Even though you are much more comfortable at home, you made the journey, like Naaman did, to come to the house of God's prophet. Oh, that's not me...I'm just the servant, the minister who is here with the prophet's message for you. Jesus is God's Prophet. Jesus is the one you came to see. He is the one who cures the leprosy of your sin. I'm not going to wave my hands over you and perform some magical ritual and heal you. I'm just the Prophet's humble servant. You are not going to see Jesus here with your eyes just like Naaman never saw Elisha. But just as Elisha's servant stood before Naaman that day, so I stand here before you, and I tell you in truth that my message to you is the very word of your Lord Jesus Christ.

You have leprosy just as Naaman did, and it's ruining your life. It's a slow, painful death. That's what the leprosy called sin does to its victims. And we are all its victims. It produces, within us, selfish and greedy hearts. It causes sorrow and tears. It brings disharmony and distrust into families. It isolates us from the love of God. And sin, like leprosy, has no cure. Everyone who has it, and all do, will die.

But you are here today at the Prophet's House because you believe that there is a cure for the leprosy of your sin. You did not journey here by chance. God drew you here. Perhaps, as with Naaman through a little unknown servant of God, He led you to this place. It was not luck. It was not your decision to come. As God led Naaman, so He desires for you to be here at Christ Lutheran Church in Augusta, Missouri. Syrian army commanders don't just happen to waltz into the land of Israel and show up at the house of God's prophet. It was God's doing. And sinners like us don't leave home on Sunday mornings to come here to God's House because of some whim. It's a miracle of God when anyone comes to His House. It's God who draws us away from our Damascus to His House of Healing.

Yes, healing...for this place is, for you, the Jordan River. Here the waters of baptism flow with forgiveness for your sins. Here the Savior's body and blood is given for your life and salvation. Here the words of absolution are heard and heaven is opened to you. My message, just like that of Elisha's servant, is simple and straightforward: Confessing your sins, repenting of that leprosy within you, come to these waters of life; be immersed here within the words of Jesus not just seven times, but seventy times seven, faithfully throughout your life unto death and you will receive the crown of life—the same healing Naaman received from God within the Jordan River is yours here through the same merciful God.

Having heard the message of God spoken by His Prophet's servant, what are you going to do? Naaman left in anger. He thought he was foolish for having come. Are there some of you who share his thoughts? Now and then, members become angry at the messenger because of the message. Now and then, members come only to wish that they had stayed home. Now and then, members come but they have no desire to wash faithfully in the waters of life. Rather, they are not seen again for one, two, or three months or longer. But God did not draw Naaman to His prophet only to have him walk away without a cure. In mercy, God through his servants, drew him to the Jordan River and he faithfully washed and was healed.

God's mercy, my friends, has not changed. The leprosy of your sin is, today, healed. He has brought you here this morning to receive His forgiveness. It is yours. His word to you is certain...Jesus took up your leprosy to the cross. He died the slow, agonizing death that

we deserve. His was isolated from the love of God for you. Your sinful leprosy is forgiven.

Even though the new Lutheran church in Washington is saying otherwise, God's forgiveness for you here is the real thing. Our baptism is the one real baptism which Jesus gave to His church. Our Holy Communion is the real flesh and blood of Christ. Our teaching is the teaching of the real church in heaven and on earth. Our creeds are the real creeds of the church. Our members who died here in Christ had real faith and are really in heaven.

This place is not Damascus. The waters flowing here are not Abana and Pharpar. This is God's place. This is the Jordan River. It may not be a magical place. It may not be the most exciting place to be on a Sunday morning, but it's where God has drawn you because He is here with His grace for you. And so you, my fellow Naamans, can leave here today as Naaman left the waters of the Jordan—rejoicing in what God has done for you; free of your leprosy; washed clean of your sin. And by God's mercy, you can resolve as He draws you, to come each week to His Jordan River to where His gifts of life in Christ are really given to you. Amen.