

GIFT TO BE SIMPLE  
[written in oral form]

2 Kings 5:1-14  
9 Year C

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There was a time when life was precarious and fearful.  
People desperately needed a god to save them.

Years ago, human existence become safer/more comfortable.

So, some segments of the church emphasized the fear of hell.  
That seemed to work for some, yet tended to be abusive.  
Others promoted loyalty and service, noble attributes.

But secularism taught us that service can be under many names and loyalty is fleeting.

These days, we ask, "Why church?" That is the theme of our current newsletter.

Why church?                      Why adhere / submit to God's ways?

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Church was unique in many ways.  
Such as people pausing to gather once a week or more to learn, listen to a lecture, and to collectively strive to be better.  
Unless one was in academia, that practice stood out.  
The church tended to be over-culture.  
Adherents surrendered control of parts of their lives.

Now days, we are more in control. We can select podcast topics and all sorts of social media groups.  
We can determine where and when we engage.  
We control the input.

In contrast, faith groups/churches set the time for worship.  
We sit and listen to a sermon without a remote control to change the channel if we do not like what we hear.

*I suppose one could get up and walk out?*

I think that surrender of control is beneficial to our soul.

Moreover, in church, we learn from the Bible a very different understanding about how to be and live.

In divergence to the secular values, we are told the least are the greatest, ... that humility is precious, and that love is God's way. We learn God's way /God's passion for us.

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Yet, fewer people submit to Biblical wisdom.  
Fewer people engage in and commit to a church.

Apparently, we are claiming to be comfortable, in control and not in need of God.  
Yet, people are not content. More and more are suffering from mental health issues and addictions.  
Anger is bubbling over.  
The World is turning.....and not in a good way.

Perhaps, our control is not working????

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Naaman was commander of the Aramaic army.  
He was a great and mighty warrior, and a man of influence and authority.  
The king admired him, too.

The text from second Kings states, and this is interesting,  
that the Lord God empowered him and gave him victories.  
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This was the God of the Hebrews helping an enemy. ???  
I suppose the people of Israel did not own or control their god?

This is a good lesson. God is above and beyond our confines and our definitions.  
We do not control God.

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Aram was a group / tribe in Syria.  
They were located on the trading crossroads.  
Aramaic was an easy language to learn and become the language of commerce.  
In the time of Jesus, Aramaic was still the dominate language in Galilee.

The Arameans were defeated by the group called the Assyrians in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

The Israelites were also their enemy.  
This God-empowered-army attacked Israel and captured a young, Israeli girl.  
This no-name girl became the servant to Naaman's wife, who also is not named.  
Naaman was mighty, and no doubt, rich.  
Yet, he had one notable, embarrassing and irritating problem.  
He had a skin disease.

The Hebrew word is the generic term for skin disease—leprosy. But it was not actually leprosy.  
Naaman was not in isolation and he was obviously fully functioning. The disease, leprosy, is physically destabilizing.

Still, the skin disease was a problem for him.

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The Jewish servant girl overheard him complaining and told Naaman's wife that the prophet Elisha in Samaria could cure him.

She, of course, told Naaman who then told his king.

The no-name king of Aram greatly respected and appreciated Naaman.

The king suggested Naaman should go see the prophet, Elisha.

This would require some tricky diplomacy since they were not on good terms with Israel.

The king said he would give Naaman a safe passage note.

Meaning, Naaman is on a mission authorized by the king of Aram.

Furthermore, the king would petition goodwill by giving the king of Israel some fantastic gifts.

The gifts included fancy garments, 340 kg of silver and 90 kg of gold.

That should purchase a lot of good will.

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In a way, the Aramean king was humbling himself by buying kindness / showing kindness.

He could have sent Naaman with the army and forced his way to see Elisha.

Instead, he chose humility and generous gentleness.

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Riding in under a white flag, Naaman presents the letter of safe passage to the no-name king of Israel.

Usually, kings take full ownership of all that happens in their dominion.

However, in this case, the king of Israel took the message personally.

The letter stated that Naaman is being sent to Israel so the "YOU" can cure him of his skin disease.

The Israeli King understood "YOU" as himself.

A touch arrogant, or maybe just presumptuous.

Subsequently, he panicked and shredded his own clothes in despair.

He assumed it was a trap, and screamed out, "Does he think I am God, that I can cure leprosy?"

The king of Israel concluded that his failure to cure the great warrior Naaman would be the rationalization for Aram to invade his country.

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I suppose the king's reaction is understandable.

When the desperate pilgrims approached the Wampanoag tribe for help, they came to them with shiny armor, guns, and gifts of trinkets and such.

Those indigenous people were likely a bit worried, too.

Even so, they did help the pilgrims to get through the winter. They also taught them about the three sisters—corn, beans, and squash. That food would sustain them.

With those instructions, the Wampanoag would have told them to bless each planting by sprinkling tobacco on the ground when the seeds are planted.

I wonder if the pilgrims did that or assumed such rituals were un-Christian. I do not know. The truth is tobacco is a natural insecticide and would protect the growing plants.

Assuming we know better can get us in trouble.

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Back to the story.

The king of Israel is freaking out.

Instantly, video clips of him ripping his clothes, thrashing about, and crying out.... flooded social media and went viral.

Soon, Elisha the man of God learned what happened.

Elisha texted his king and asked, "Why have you torn your clothes? Why are you acting like a fool?

Just tell Naaman to come to me in order to experience a real prophet.

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Naaman did just that.

He arrived with his whole entourage, horses, chariots and all.

Naaman rang the door bell to Elisha's house.

Elisha sends his messenger to answer the door and gives Naaman Elisha's instructions.

Naaman is to go to the Jordan River to wash himself 7 times to be cured.

Naaman felt insulted. He is livid.

Naaman, the powerful, the elite, a person of status and prestige expected Elisha to honour him by coming in person.

Naaman imagined that Elisha would say magical words, conjure up God, and touch his skin rash to cure him.

Instead, he received a double message:

Simple instructions **and**.... that prophets, a person of God, are above warriors.

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Naaman rants and screams just like the Israeli king, except his are curses from extreme anger, not from fear.

?Maybe, there is not much difference between fear and anger?

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Naaman yells out cursing the muddy Jordan river and insisting the rivers in Syria are far better. With Hubristic, haughty, marching steps he goes to his horse to leave and return to Syria.

Naaman's pride was an obstacle to his own healing.  
His pride was preventing healing.

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A couple of his lowly, powerless, no-name servants approached him and asked,

"My lord, if the prophet had asked you to do something challenging and difficult, would you not have done that?"

"Is it too difficult, too hard for you to just to wash and be clean?"                      ??????  
This gave him pause.

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Naaman, did what he was **told** to do by Elisha the man of God. He "**Went down**" immersed himself in the Jordan as instructed and was restored. His flesh became like a young boy's.

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This story is called the Healing of Naaman.

There is a big difference between a restoration and a healing.

I have prayed for people to be restored and healed. Sometimes, they were healed in the process of dying.

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Naaman's skin disease was cured. He was restored.

However, verse 14 states, "He went down". The Hebrew word has a double meaning. The first meaning is "To Humble." The second is to descend. The Jordan River does not have much of a bank.

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Naaman "Went Down". He humbled himself and was healed.

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Aside from Elisha, the most influential people in this story were the powerless, no-name servants

Instead of moaning and complaining, they demonstrated compassion and shared wisdom.

In humility, with humility, they made the world a better place. They had little control, yet gave what they had—insight and hope.

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If we look around at our world, we will observe the mighty and powerful in control.

The robber barons, the capitalist tycoons control politicians, information and persuasion.  
They have rendered war, poverty, exploitation, and injustices.

They have spread racism, sexism, bigotry and misogyny.

Creation, our environment and climate, are past the tipping point. Life is becoming  
precarious and fearful.

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God offers a better way.  
Jesus taught and lived that better way.

The Naaman story is about the mighty and controlling being laid low.  
The story is about the humble providing salvation.

Who do we align with? How much control do we cherish?

How often do we listen to the weak and powerless for insight and wisdom?

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Echoing from the passage is the call to "Go Down",

To go down and find humility,  
To Let go of control,

To be in creation, not above, and to live under God, in community,  
To be a part of the healing and wholeness.

For healing and for peace the answer is simple.

[Sing "Tis the Gift to be Simple"]