

2 Kings 5:1-14
Enemy Love
WRCoB 11.6.22

My wife, Judith, is frequently asked
“Where are you from?”

She knows why they ask.
It’s because of her accent.

And so, she answers, “I’m from Iowa.”

“No, seriously, where are you really from?” they ask.

And she insists she’s from Iowa.

She tires of being prejudiced against
Because of the way she talks.

Many perceive people with accented English
As less smart than they.

When in fact, they know at least two languages
And are working in their second language.

For instance, English is Judith’s third language.

In a study by the University of Chicago, they found

A foreign accent undermines a person's credibility in ways that the speaker and the listener don't consciously realize, new research shows.

Because an accent makes a person harder to understand, listeners are less likely to find what the person says as truthful, researchers found. The problem of credibility increases with the severity of the accent.

~~

And so, it surprises me this little Israelite servant girl
With the thick Hebrew accent
Would have been taken seriously.

But the whole story of the healing of Naaman
Is hinged upon her compassionate advice.

Were it not for the “love of enemy” quality about her
Our story would never have made it to Scripture.

~~

During this period in history
Israel was a divided country.

The northern kingdom was named Israel
And the southern kingdom, Judah.

King Jehoram was king of Israel during the time of Naaman.

Syria is named Aram in most translations of the Bible.

The language Jesus spoke, Aramaic
Originated out of the country of Syria/Aram.

Israel and Syria were rival nations
Eyeing each other’s wealth and power.

Naaman was commander-in-chief of the Syrian army
First in command, under Ben Hadad, the king of Syria.

Naaman had everything going for him.

Everything you'd want in terms of power and prestige.

The problem was, he had leprosy
In his house was this enslaved Hebrew girl.
A servant to Naaman's wife.

Yes, though Naaman was a great and powerful man
He stood helpless and vulnerable before her.

A young girl, to him, of little significance.
And yet, it was her pity
That initiated the journey toward healing.

Naaman was an enemy to her people.

She was probably captured
During one of many Syrian raids into Israel.

She could easily have justified a hatred for her captives.

Instead, she is moved to compassion and mentions
Elisha's healing powers to Naaman's wife.

Who then mentions it to Naaman.

Who then mentions it to the king.

The king, in turn writes a referral letter to the King of Israel
And sends off Naaman and his entourage.

Armed with enough gifts to buy his way out of anything
Naaman travels to Jerusalem
And stands before the king with the letter.

The king reads the letter and tears his clothes.

“Am I, God, that this man sends word to me
To heal his commander-in-chief?”

But the prophet Elisha hearing of the encounter
Told the king to send Naaman to him.

Now Elisha (not Elijah but Elijah’s protégé)
Was a simple and unassuming man.

He lived modestly in a humble abode.

And so, picture the ancient Palestinian equivalent to
Let’s say, an old rundown trailer
With an overgrown yard
Down along the edge of the river.

A dirt path leads up to it.

Laundry is on the line
And chickens are free-ranging
Among the junk cars in the front yard.

Now picture the commander-in-chief’s motorcade
With its police escort, sirens blaring, lights flashing.

The big powerful hummer pulling into the driveway
Sending chickens squawking and flying away.

Here’s the second most powerful man in Syria
An enemy to the nation of Israel

Stepping out of his chariot
Tip-toeing around the chicken droppings
Standing at the door of the mobile home.

~~

Now to add insult to injury.

If that wasn't humiliating enough for the commander-in-chief.

At his arrival, the door opens a crack.

You can see the security chain still across the door

A servant peeks out

And gives Naaman a message from Elisha

“Go wash in the Jordan seven times.”

Seriously, can you blame Naaman?

I mean, how rude is that?

Is this the way you treat a guest?

Much less a five-star general?

Elisha won't even come to the door.

And then, to top it all off

Elisha tells Naaman to go jump in the river?

Well, this is too much for Naaman

Who is about to declare war on Israel

For the way Elisha treated him.

Naaman's servants, however, saves the day.

“If Elisha had told you to do something difficult

You would have done it, right?”

“Had he told you to stand on your head

Eat crackers and whistle Dixie

You would have gladly tried.”

“But instead, he simply told you to wash and be clean”

“And you refuse?”

And so, reluctantly, Naaman
The second most powerful man in Syria

Whose power, position, prestige and wealth
Couldn't even buy a face-to-face with Elisha

Stepped into the River Jordan
Not once but seven times
And comes out completely healed!

Thanks to a poor, little, enslaved Hebrew girl.
Naaman's servants
And an old sage living in a run-down trailer
And the Good Lord above!

With a new lease on life, Naaman joyfully proclaims

**2 Kings 5:15a CEV "Now I know that the God of Israel is
the only God in the whole world."**

~~

The story is rich in meaning.

And one can go in several directions with it.

It is certainly a story of God's healing powers.

It is also a story of Naaman's conversion
To faith in the God of Israel.

You could also look at it as a story
That prefigures Christian baptism.

Maybe Naaman's washing in the Jordan
Is how baptism becomes an expression
Of spiritual cleansing

Baptism is first mentioned with John the Baptist in NT times.

But what grabs me most in this story
Is the importance of the minor characters in the plot.

There's a bunch of powerful people in the story.

You've got Naaman, the commander-in-chief
The King of Syria
The King of Israel
And of course, the Prophet Elisha.

However
The people that really made a difference
Aren't even named!

They play minor roles but are major players.

One, of course, is the little Hebrew girl with the thick accent

It was she who encouraged Naaman to go
And seek help from the Prophet Elisha.

Imagine!

These powerful people stooping down
Listening intently to her in her broken Aramaic

Surprisingly, they took her seriously.

The other minor players were the servants of Naaman
Who encouraged Naaman to do as Elisha told him

They prevented any escalation of conflict between the two.

These, supposedly insignificant people
Are the ones who changed the outcome of the story.

~~

All around us are ordinary people
Making extraordinary strides in kingdom building.

Doing the work God called them to do.



Take for example Rosa Parks.

She worked as a seamstress in a department store
In Montgomery AL.

On December 1, 1955
Tired from a long day at work
Rosa boarded a bus to go home.

When she refused to give up her seat
Which was actually the front seat
Of the black section of the bus

And move to the back of the bus
In order for a white person to sit where she sat
She was arrested for civil disobedience.

This seemingly minor event
Prompted the Montgomery Bus Boycott
The spark that ignited the civil rights movement.



Another was a young girl from Pakistan.

Malala Yousafzai knew the importance of education
From her father, a teacher at a girl's school.

The Taliban took control of her town in 2008
And prohibited girls from going to school.

Malala publicly spoke out against it.

She was shot in the left side of the head.

After months of recovery in the UK.

She refused to stay quiet and created the Malala Fund

A charity dedicated to ensuring that every girl
Has an opportunity to get an education.

At seventeen, she became the youngest person ever
To receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

~~

All around us seemingly small insignificant people
Are making significant differences.

They continue the work of Jesus
Peacefully, simply, together.

All of us, whether big or small can make a difference.

We might never know how effective our work might be.

But like the mosquito

It you think you are too small to be effective
You have never been in bed with a mosquito.

We can be witnesses of God's great love
By doing justice
Loving kindness
And walking humbly with God.

~~

I am reminded
Of a seemingly insignificant moment in time
In a seemingly insignificant town
Somewhere in rural Palestine.

The birth of a child who was named Jesus.

In fact, the whole gospel message
Encapsulates the notion that God uses the weak
To accomplish God's will on earth

Paul says it this way.

1 Corinthians 1:26-27 CEV

²⁶ My dear friends, remember what you were when God chose you. The people of this world didn't think that many of you were wise. Only a few of you were in places of power, and not many of you came from important families. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of this world to put the wise to shame. He chose the weak things of this world to put the powerful to shame.

And so, the next time someone with a super thick accent
Is recommending you do something
You might want to take heed.