

St Peter's, Ealing  
Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2016  
Trinity 20

“Make us eager to do your will”

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Sometimes you get those stories in the Old Testament that you can really enjoy. The story of Naaman is one of those. Here is the story of a rich and powerful man. Naaman was a commander in the King's army. He had the ear of the King, probably land and houses and servants. He commanded a force that could bring glory or death. This was a man used to glory and honour. People bowed down to him, the only person he bowed down to was the King by whom he was held in high favour; a great honour. He had one weakness however, one thing people could comment on and they probably did a lot. If you are a person with such authority and presence, then any chink in your armour can be used against you; Naaman's skin condition was just such a weakness. It is referred to in this story as leprosy.

Leprosy comes in different kinds. But in the days of Naaman many different skin conditions were grouped together under a generic term leprosy. So we don't really know what Naaman had. Though it probably wasn't what we can clinically referred to these days a leprosy. It was probably unsightly and unpleasant, maybe even quiet debilitating; why else would it cause him such consternation. He can probably shrug off name calling, something other couriers wouldn't have done to his face anyway. But personally he suffered.

Then comes this news, a prophet in Samaria has the power to heal. What would Naaman expect of the prophet of God? Fanfare; treacherous tasks, dangerous quests, something surely befitting Naaman's rank and authority? Climb a mountain; fight a monster; rescue a damsel maybe? Instead he is told to go and wash. We can argue the Jordan is a special river, or that the number of times Naaman has to wash is significant. But Naaman took it to be a simple, almost belittling task; something quite beneath him. In deed if it was that simple why did he have to travel all this way in the first instance? Elijah's words are so simple, “Wash, and be clean”. When Naaman got over himself that is precisely what he did and he was healed.

There is a reason Elijah didn't come out to meet Naaman. He didn't see the need to enter into a theological debate with Naaman, why he wasn't being given a quest or challenge to complete. Elijah wanted to emphasis the simplicity of God's actions in the world. God doesn't ask great things of his people. God doesn't challenge his people or put them to the test. That's all dealt with in the cross and the empty tomb of Easter.

Jesus comes across ten lepers; almost stumbles into them. As they were ostracised these guys were probably suffering from a contagious form of the condition. They too weren't asked to do anything courageous or dangerous. They merely asked for healing and it was given. All Naaman had to do was ask and the healing was his. We can imagine the sheer relief and joy of those lepers when they knew what had been done for them. In being healed they were given back their families and friends and their lives. Yet one came back to give thanks. It wasn't that the other nine were bad mannered or disrespectful. The one that came back knew, in the simplicity of Jesus' actions, he had been given everything. Naaman eventually got that and he, like the tenth leper, placed God at the centre of his thanksgiving.

In today's collect we prayed to be eager to do God's will. Naaman and the tenth leper eventually got that. They came back not to deify or praise the healer, they came to give thanks to God. In their words they showed their eagerness for God. Naaman said "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel". The tenth leper returned to Jesus "praising God with a loud voice".

It's this eagerness God seeks from us. An acceptance that in the ordinary, in the daily we experience God in all his wonders and we should be eager. In being eager we reflect the effect of God upon us on our hearts and in our minds. How then are we to be eager to do the will of God? Paul calls us to be God's ambassadors, to proclaim God in all we do and say. We don't need to do the spectacular, the courageous or the difficult.

To be eager in the way of God, like Naaman or the tenth leper, we only need to see God in the world. Not through the spectacles of the extraordinary, though from time to time this may happen, but in the way we are called to live. If we hear the word of God our life is changed. Paul says to Timothy in his letter, "if we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will reign with him". To be eager in the way of God requires a change in us. Again Paul says, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth." We only need to praise God in all we do and say, giving glory to God in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour and to give our lives to him in prayer, then we too will be healed. We too will give praise to the living God.