

ORDINARY TIME – 4th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

RECOLLECTING OURSELVES FOR WORSHIP

Music (please use this time for quiet and reflection)

Gong [followed by silence]

Call to Worship – 2 Kings:5:1-14

Hymn – 460 [Holy God, We Praise Your Name]

Opening Prayer

OUR HUMANNES AND GOD'S GRACE

Call to Confession

Unison Prayer of Confession

Gracious God, as a child I learned different ways to keep busy, and by being busy I learned to involve myself in the effort to make something out of myself. I do this automatically, and it seems natural and normal to me. In fact, when I am not busy making something out of myself, I feel as though something is wrong with me and my life. What I did not understand as I did this is that by making this effort I essentially and effectively lost the connection to my own interior life, especially anything about me which might inhibit this effort to remain busy and make something out of myself. I find myself troubled because my efforts to remain busy are being disabled by the interior life I have suppressed. I have always thought the effort to be busy and make something out of myself was what you were supporting. But I am now thinking that you are what is bringing my interior life to my awareness and asking me to attend to it before my resisting it wears me out and breaks me down.

Personal Prayer of Confession in Silence

Assurance of Pardon

LISTENING FOR THE WORD OF GOD

Story for the Children

Scripture – Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Prompting

Silence and Reflection

RESPONDING TO THE WORD OF GOD

Hymn – 278 [Our God, to Whom We Turn]

Announcements

Minute for Mission

Our Gifts and Offerings

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise Christ all creatures here below;

Praise Holy Spirit, Comforter;

One God, Triune, whom we adore. Amen.

The Prayers of the People and Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us in the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours

now and forever. Amen.

GOING OUT – to serve, to journey, to live the word

Hymn – 340 [Eternal Light, Shine in My Heart]

Charge and Benediction

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

| | | |
|--------|-------|---------------------------------|
| TODAY | 10:00 | Worship and Church School |
| | 11:00 | Coffee and Fellowship |
| | 11:20 | Conversation |
| MONDAY | 1:00 | Centering Prayer, church office |

Lectionary Readings from Cycle C for July 14, 2019
Amos 7:7-17; Psalm 82; Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37.

F.Y.I.

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Ordinary Time, 4th Sunday after Pentecost

(2 Kings 5:1-14 & Luke 10:1-11, 16-20)

We will translate the story of Naaman into 21st century thought forms. The story about Naaman concerns a man who suffers from a conflict between the directive within him to be agreeable and the experience of his internal life where he is being chastised severely. I am reminded of life in the present where so much emphasis is placed on how we present, and of the way that pressure influences us to suppress anything about ourselves which does not present well according to the standards we have internalized. Immense suffering comes from this internal pressure and the suppression we enact in an attempt to resolve it.

Naaman is directed to immerse himself repeatedly in the exploration of his internal chastising, and to do this as the way to clear-up the internal conflict from which he suffers. I am fascinated by how an Old Testament story presents what in our time is known as psychological thinking—going to the past as the way to understand, clarify and perhaps modify a situation or condition in the present.

I find the process described in the story of Naaman to be a useful paradigm regarding how Christianity might be presented and made relevant in our time. As psychological thinking becomes available to us as a useful tool to help us live, it is possible to merge that thinking and the Christian tradition into a way of life that is both valuable and beneficial. If we think of God as that which develops our cognitive capacities, then life with God could be presented as involving learning to think psychologically. When we find ourselves having difficulty coping with what our life brings us, rather than using judgment and chastisement as a way to bring us into agreement with the values we internalized, we go to the past as the way to clarify and understand what makes life in the present difficult, and then we use that understanding to clear up and resolve the conflicts that are impacting us. The Christian understanding of God lends itself to thinking psychologically in that it sees God as that which initiates and supports the cognitive abilities involved in thinking psychologically. Prayer becomes listening within for what is disclosed to us about the person we are in the present so we can comprehend more deeply why we are as we are. To be a Christian is to offer to others, in the way we live and interact, this way of having life through thoughtful reflection. [Jim Robie, 7-5-19]

**Ordinary Time – 4th Sunday after Pentecost
(2 Kings 5:1-14 & Luke 10:1-11, 16-20)**

We will begin by considering the Old Testament reading for today, the story of Naaman [2 Kings 5:1-14], because it provides a subject that will apply to the Gospel reading. The name “Naaman” means “pleasantness;” it comes from a root “to be agreeable.” Naaman was a leper. The Hebrew word translated as “leper” is the word “to scourge,” and is a figure of speech meaning “to have leprosy.” Scourge means “to chastise severely.” If we internalize this, we can suggest that Naaman is a man who suffers from a conflict between what he should be, represented by his name, and his internal experience of being chastised, manifested on his skin. He should be pleasant and agreeable, but his inner experience is that of being chastised severely, and that inner experience would make it stressful, if not impossible, to be what he should be. Such stress would give anyone a skin condition. As the story unfolds, Naaman is sent to the prophet Elisha who will cure him [the word translated as “cure” in this story is a Hebrew word meaning “to gather for any purpose”]. Elisha tells Naaman to wash in the river Jordan seven times [the word for “seven” can also be translated as “an indefinite number of times”]. The name Jordan means “a descender” [literally, to go downward]. If we continue to internalize this story, Elisha tells Naaman to immerse himself in a descent into his conflict between what he should be and his internal experience. Naaman objects; he would rather be immersed in that with which he is already familiar, namely rushing around rapidly and building things [the meaning of the names Abana and Pharpar, referring to the two rivers in his home country, Aram]. Eventually, Naaman is persuaded to immerse himself in this descent, something which he would do repeatedly, and the outcome is that he is made “clean,” a word literally meaning “to be bright, i.e. by implication ‘to be pure,’ or physically ‘sound, clear’”. In other words, his skin condition clears up. I propose that this happens as a result of this descent, wherein the conflict between what he should be and his inner experience diminishes as he is gathered together into a greater unity because he becomes more familiar with his inner experience and is also able to think through

what he thinks he should be. We are all like Naaman in the sense that what we should be and our internal experience often conflict, and the stress of that conflict “gives us hives” [literally and/or metaphorically]. When we become aware that this is the condition of our life, the awareness gives us a choice about what we immerse ourselves in: our familiar routines which have us “rushing around rapidly in an effort to make something of ourselves,” or an ongoing descent into our interior to unpack the tension between what we should be and our internal experience.

Most people’s religious journey begins when they can no longer ignore the conflict between what they should be and their internal experience, when they can no longer ignore the inner voice which chastises them for feeling as they do and therefore not being able to whole-heartedly be who they should be. Before the awareness of this conflict dawns on us, we, like Naaman, rush around rapidly, immersing ourselves in the task of making something of ourselves. But once the awareness does dawn on us, we have the opportunity to immerse ourselves in and become familiar with other things: our ideas as to who we should be, the truth about how we feel and the inner chastisement that occurs within us. Perhaps, like Naaman, we will eventually choose to immerse ourselves in this descent into what lies below the surface of our life, and as we do so, our lives will come together in a different way which does greater justice to us.

The Gospel reading describes Jesus giving instructions about inviting others into this descent. He says we are sent out like lambs among wolves. That is, we need to be aware that people are not neutral about looking at themselves and descending into their own interior, and they can be hostile if encouraged to make the descent. We do not want to be too programmatic about making this effort, but should instead look for an opening, some indication that another would be welcoming of an invitation to look within. If we find such an indication, we need to explain that the intent of this descent is to bring “peace,” and that the idea in this word is that the fullness of life comes by joining with some things about ourselves that at first we wish to reject [the Greek word translated into English as “peace” comes from the root “to join”]. The instruction is that we are to explain that becoming familiar with what lies in the interior

will make us uneasy and is also the way God gathers us together and “cleans up” our life. If people welcome and receive this understanding, spend time with them. Help them understand that the insights which come in this immersion are the influence of God in their lives and will work changes in them. Pay particular attention to those who are “sick” [the Greek means “without strength”] and attend to what makes them weak. If we are not welcome, make it clear that the influence of God is disclosed in what we present, and then move on and leave behind any residues of the visit.

What we will encounter on this descent is what is known as “Satan” [the word means “the accuser”]. To descend into our interior will bring us face to face with what accuses, chastises and criticizes us. As we become familiar with our internal critic and learn to think about it, its power will diminish, and we will watch it fall from the elevated place it has had in our lives since childhood. This descent will connect us to something in us that will be like a snake [the Greek word is a figure of speech for a malicious person] or a scorpion [something that stings and poisons us]. Freedom from these things, or influence over them, is what comes through this descent, as we become more familiar with them and think about where they came from and whether they are true or not. Jesus says that “nothing will hurt us.” The word hurt is the Greek word “unjust.” I think this means that what happens on this descent will bring us out in a place where we see and treat ourselves more equitably and fairly, and therefore our lives will end up more balanced. However, do not rejoice that our lives become more balanced; rejoice that we are called to this immersion and descent. In other words, do not focus on the outcome; focus on the process.

The difficulty we will encounter in making this descent into our own interior life is that doing so will ask us to be aware, to have awareness, of our own interior, something that is not always easy to possess. This issue is not addressed in either of these two texts. The difficulty is that awareness seems to always be associated with assessment and evaluation, both of which tend to be hostile and antagonistic rather than supportive and sympathetic, and none of us are eager to know anything about ourselves that results in our being attacked and condemned. As a result, awareness is generally

blunted or muted, or even evaporated, before its content can be considered. Christianity deals with this by placing this bias that operates in us in the center of our awareness. God keeps connecting us to the truth that we tend to be hostile and antagonistic toward anything that does not meet certain inherited criteria regarding what is allowable. A large part of the interior journey is our being made more and more conscious of this tendency, the way it manifests in us and the way we feel when it is operating, so that we can see it at work and take it into account. All of our language about the love, acceptance, welcome, mercy, compassion, etc. of God are designed to counterbalance our innate tendency to be hostile and antagonistic toward anything new that comes to our awareness. Our culture urges us to bury any awareness of our own hostility and antagonism toward ourselves, which makes it less visible and available, and more insidious.

It is not easy to get to know our interior life with its critical voice; it is not easy to see how our interior life affects us; it is not easy to understand our interior life and use it. However, this journey brings to us the fullness of our life, and an experience of the personal and intimate influence of the God who guides us on this journey.

[Jim Robie, 7-5-19, 4th after Pentecost; Cycle C, 2 Kings 5:1-14 & Luke 10:1-11, 16-20]