

Sunday, July 3, 2016

2 Kings 5:1-14

Galatians 6:1-16

### Naaman's Gentle Healing

Summer has begun and it is my prayer that in these next weeks you will be able to sit, relax and enjoy the sunshine, the warm temperatures and the gentle breeze upon your faces. We do not experience a long summer in Canada so we must make the most of good weather as we are able. To feel the gentle breeze of the warm winds of summer is a gift and a reminder that God is moving amongst us and calls us to do something wonderful- be gentle like the Spirit.

We learned last week that one of the fruit of the spirit is gentleness. But this is a word that is difficult to define because being gentle has different meanings under various circumstances. But usually it is taking a soft approach to a task. When one is baking, often the recipe will state 'gently beat eggs' before adding to the margarine. How do we understand this? Beat the eggs but do it softly—it sounds almost like an oxymoron. Maybe this photo from this week's Macleans will help to explain what being gentle means. On May 1 Monique Brunet and her husband Matt were evacuated along with 90 000 others from Fort MacMurray and they headed south to Athabasca 300 km south. Monique began having contractions and after arriving in Edmonton. The next day they headed to the hospital. A few hours later Brielle was born. The couple wanted to 'show how we (they) feel about the firefighters as they put their lives at risk for others, family, house and everyone else.' So they had an Edmonton photographer take photos of Matt wearing a yellow firefighter's uniform from a local fire hall. And placing the newborn baby into the helmet, the message was clear—the firefighters although facing danger, need to realize again why they do this—for the peace of a newborn baby as she gently sleeps in safety. There is no concern in her face, she is safe and loved. This photo also reminds us that we need to be gentle and remember those who care for others. And we need to be gentle so that if someone is not walking the path Christ teaches, we may lead them back to the right path.

But what does being gentle mean?

We pick up Elisha's story in 2 Kings. After Elijah had ascended into heaven in a whirlwind, Elisha picked up his mentor's cloak and ha All the people who were on the other side of the River, watched all what had happened and they exclaimed, The Spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." Elisha had received the gift from his master, mentor and friend Elijah. But with this choice of ability, there was much responsibility.

Naaman was a highly regarded and great man. He was a commander of the army of the King of Aram, a valiant soldier yet he had leprosy. Leprosy was a disease of the skin which at that time was incurable and caused much pain as the nerve endings of fingers and toes to die, leading to the removal of the same. However, during one of his successful battles, Naaman had taken captive a young girl from Israel and she served Naaman's wife. And it is this unnamed girl who speaks gently to her mistress about how Naaman needs only to go to see the prophet in Samaria and he would be cured.

commander. But the path that he now led was filled with faith. Naaman was healed gently not only to his body, but to his spirit. He believed in God.

But what made Naaman's healing gentle? What is gentleness? Johann Wolfgang Van Goethe states: Nothing is so strong as true gentleness. Nothing is so gentle as true strength.

Gentleness is having the right, the power and authority to do something but choosing to bring it under control to fulfill a higher ground. Elisha was a prophet who had asked for twice the spirit of Elijah as the mentor and teacher ascended into heaven. The spirit was upon him and the people saw this as he had crossed the Jordan River on dry land. God's Spirit had blessed him. When Naaman a powerful army leader had his king write to the King of Israel, it was Elisha who intervened and prevented disastrous pain and possibly a war. But the way in which Naaman was to become well again was kind and gentle and Elisha knew what was going to happen and when. All Naaman had to do was follow his directions. Elisha fulfilled a higher ground for not only did Naaman become physically well, he opened up his heart and believed in God.

Our reading from Paul's letter to the church in Galatia includes further instructions about 'doing good to all.' We read, "If someone is caught in sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted." We are to care for each other and if we do, we will fulfill the law of Christ.

A story is told about a man who was on a luxury liner and suddenly he falls overboard. He can't swim and in desperation he begins calling for help. Now on board the ship were several would be rescuers who witnessed the incident. The first man was a MORALIST. When he saw the man fall overboard he immediately reached into his briefcase and pulled out a book on how to swim. He now tossed it to him and he yelled: Now brother, you read that and just follow the instructions and you will be alright.

The man next to him happened to be an IDEALIST. When he saw the man fall overboard he immediately jumped into the water and began swimming all around the drowning man saying: Now just watch me swim. Do as I do and you will be alright.

The person next to him happened to be a member of the INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH. He looked upon the drowning man's plight with deep concern. He yelled out: Now, just hold on friend. Help is on the way. We are going to establish a committee and dialogue your problem. And then, if we have come up with the proper financing, we will resolve your dilemma.

The next man on deck happened to be a representative of the school of POSITIVE THINKING. He yelled out to the drowning man: "Friend, this situation is not nearly as bad as you think. Think dry!"

The next man on board happened to be a REVIVALIST. By this time the drowning man was going down for the third time and desperately began waving his arm. Seeing that, the revivalist yelled out: Yes brother, I see that hand, is there another? Is there another?

Naaman tells the King of Aram about the young girl's statement and because the King realizes how important Naaman is to his army, the king supports his travel to Israel, writing a letter of reference to the king of Israel. Naaman also takes silver, gold and clothes to offer to the king with the hope that he can be healed. Israel's king reads the letter which causes much heartache because he can do nothing. He questions, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!"

The prophet Elisha, hears about the king's dilemma and asks the king to tell the man to go to him so that he will know that there is a prophet in Israel. Naaman is directed to Elisha's house and upon stopping at the Elisha's door with horses and chariots a messenger is dispatched to answer the door by the prophet. The message for Naaman is to go and wash himself 7 times in the Jordan River so that he would be cleansed.

Naaman however is angry. The prophet whom his servant girl told him about didn't even meet him at the door. A messenger shared what he was to do. And Naaman is angry because he wanted the prophet to at least meet him, call upon God, wave his hand over the spot on his skin and heal him. But none of this happened. He was told by a messenger to wash himself in the Jordan River. Naaman even asks whether the Jordan River could really be better than the rivers of Damascus? Naaman is just not sure about what will happen and who it is that will bring healing.

Naaman's servants speak to him and risked their lives in doing so. They ask, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he tells you, Wash and be cleansed."

Naaman wanted the crowd to watch as the prophet heals him in the street because he is an important man in Aram. Yet Naaman is to go to the Jordan River and wash himself and because of this Naaman's healing becomes personal, gentle and sacred. He dips down 1,2,3, 4, 5,6, times and nothing happens. Yet when he dips himself 7 times and then comes out of the water- he was healed.

Naaman believes in the God of Israel after he is healed and tells the prophet Elisha, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Naaman was healed gently and caringly. There was no lights, no band or music, no huge crowds, just a man who was sick who listened to the prophet, and was gently healed. There was no screaming or questioning of what occurred but there a man who was an important army leader, made well because he listened to the words of Elisha. He became well through the Spirit acting through Elisha and all who cared for him. He had not believed but now he did and he was grateful.

Naaman was healed gently by the Spirit of God upon him. There were no chemicals, or medicines, no flashes of light or even mud. Water- healed the leprosy and he came to believe in God. The path that he had been leading was filled with strength and honour as an army

And finally, the last man on deck, was a REALIST. He immediately plunged into the water, at the risk of his own life, and pulled the victim to safety.

What does this story mean for us today? We need to be real about what God is calling us to do. Elisha was real = he knew how Naaman could be healed physically- but also on his mind was Naaman's faith in God. Elisha could have come out on the street and healed him right away but he took the gentle route of having Naaman be patient in the process towards wholeness.

And as Paul writes, we are to carry each other's burdens so that when we share Christ's love, we will reap what we sow. We are to do good to those who belong to the family of believers, and by being gentle with those who need to hear Christ's message of love. Those who hear the story of Christ's love need to know that his death and resurrection was for them. And even though they might not believe and receive Christ right away, our time and effort with others enables us to please the Spirit.

Gently we are to tell the story—so that the Spirit will move to open the hearts of those who are willing to hear it. Gently we are to let Christ's love be shared in what we say and do. Gently the Spirit will come upon us and bring change to those whom we care about so that we will rise and know just like Naaman, that God is alive and His Spirit is moving amongst us and bringing hope. But we must let our gentleness be evident to all. We must gently work together so that God's Spirit will move us to something more profound and caring than ever experienced before.

Max Lucado shares this about why we should be gentle.

I choose gentleness. Nothing is won by force. I choose to be gentle. If I raise my voice may it be only in praise. If I clench my fist, may it be only in prayer. If I make a demand, may it be only of myself.

Let us pray:

Loving God, please teach us to be gentle. Remind us of the many ways you have shown gentleness to us. When we respond to others, help us see how you love them and died for them also. Show us how to stand for what is right without abandoning gentleness and respect. Teach us to speak the truth in love