

## **SERMON: The Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity**

### **The First Lesson: 2 Kings 5:1-15 (RSV)**

1 Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and in high favor, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. 2 Now the Syrians on one of their raids, had carried off a little maid from the land of Israel and she waited on Naaman's wife. 3 She said to her mistress, would that my Lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy. 4 So Naaman went in, and told his lord, "Thus and so spoke the maiden that is of the land of Israel." 5 And the king of Syria said, go now, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand shekels of gold, and ten festal garments.

6 And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "when this letter reaches you, know I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy. 7 When the king of Israel had read the letter, he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me.

8 But when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, why have you rent your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel. 9 So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and halted at the door of Elisha's house. 10 And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean. 11 But Naaman was angry, and went away, saying "Behold, I thought, He would surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and cure the leper.

12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean? 14 So he turned and went away in a rage. 13 But his servants came near, and said to him, "My father, if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much rather then, when he says to you, "wash, and be clean?" 14 So he went down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the word of the man of God: and his flesh was restored like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

15 Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, “Behold, I know that there is no God in all earth, but in Israel: so, accept now a present from your servant.” now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant.”

### **The Second Lesson:** John 4:46-54

46 So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. 47 When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judaea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. 48 Jesus therefore said unto him, “Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe. 49 The official said unto him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” 50 Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your son will live.’ The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way. 51 As he was going down, his servants met him, and told him his son was living. 52 So he asked the hour when he began to mend, and they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” 53 The father knew that he himself believed, and all his household. 54 This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

### **Introduction**

I grew up in southeast Idaho and in the days before the internet and video games, I spent a great deal of time outside. Where I lived was rural, even in the middle of town, and it was not uncommon to see huge fields filled with various trees and shrubs. It was a wonderful playground and there was always something to explore. My house was no exception. Our back yard was large by today’s lot sizes, and it had tons of trees to climb and dirt piles to dig in. One tree, ended up becoming my favorite place to hang out, read a comic book in or contemplate my eight-year-old life. It was not always this way, in fact there was a time I was unable to climb it, paralyzed by my own fear and uncertainty.

It stood at the end of our yard, right along an old wooden fence. It was a seasoned tree with a massive trunk and branches that extended into the sky. About 7 feet up, a small bowl appeared where the branches sprung upward and surrounded the hollow space. It was the perfect place for a hideout, a spot of respite and a place to hang out. The problem for me was, I couldn’t climb up to the hollow.

I soon discovered that if you climbed up onto the fence, put your foot on a little knot that extended from the tree, pushed up and swung around you could grab an upper branch and hoist yourself up into the inner sanctuary. At the time the ground

seemed a long way down and I was afraid of falling. My fear paralyzed me and every time I reached up, I pictured myself plummeting to the ground and it stopped me from moving forward. I was frustrated and upset at myself.

One day my father was out in the back yard and saw me lamenting about my situation while standing on the fence. He walked over and asked me what was the problem. I explained my situation and how I feared falling out of the tree. I remember he was very serious as he looked up at the route I was to take to get up in the tree. He mulled it over in his mind and then in the authoritative voice he often used he said, "Right John, have a go at it again, if you fall, I will catch you." Without saying another word, he moved over to the other side of the tree and stood under where I was planning to climb. I climbed up on the fence, stepped on the knot and saw him standing below me. I took a deep breath, hoisted myself up and grabbed the branch, propelling myself up into the center of the tree. My father smiled at me and walked off as if he never for a second doubted I would make it. From that moment on, I had no trouble climbing up into the tree.

As I think back on that day, I doubt my father would have been able to catch me. Maybe cushion the fall at best, but I didn't think about that then. I had the utmost confidence he would be there and that if I failed, he would catch me. I had faith in my father and totally believed in his ability to keep me safe. I know today that there is nothing a good father wouldn't do for his children. How much more willing and able is our Heavenly Father to help us, keep us safe and listen to our prayers?

**God gives Naaman clear instructions as to how he can cure his leprosy, yet he wants to do it his way instead of what God commands. (2 Kings 5:1-15)**

In both of our lessons today, we see how important, and how difficult, it is to trust God in our daily lives. In our first lesson, Naaman, who has leprosy, goes to see the prophet Elisha who he has heard can cure him of this malady. Elisha tells him to go and wash in the Jordan river seven times and he will be cured. Seems like a reasonable request, but Naaman is angry at first. He wants the miracle cure but, like many of us, want to do it his way and not the way God tells us him He wants it done. He states in our reading from 2 Kings:

"Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?"

Naaman tries to barter with what he is told he must do. While he acknowledges that God will restore his health, he also wants to be comfortable and do it his way.

How many times has God put a command in our hearts, or there is something we know we should do differently, but it was not convenient or might be difficult for us? We, like Naaman, may try and barter with God to do things our way. Instead of trusting that God's plan for us is the best plan, we, in our human arrogance, think we know how to do it better. In the end Naaman, after hearing the wise counsel of his servants, decides to trust God and do exactly what he is commanded to do. Once he has surrendered his will and follows what God has ordained, he is restored back to health and his skin is "restored unto that of a little child". What God has promised has come true.

### **An official comes to Jesus to restore his child back to health and is amazed at how Jesus heals him. (John 4:46-54)**

Again, in our second lesson we encounter an "official", or in the King James Version, a Nobleman, who is also called upon to trust in God. In the scripture it is inferred that his man has some status or importance in society. His son was dying, and he needed Jesus to heal him. We could assume that he had tried all the local resources and had heard of Jesus healing people and performing miracles. This official traveled many miles, at least a day's journey, from Capernaum to Galilee to ask Jesus to come and see his son. When he asked for help, Jesus knew that he would struggle with his faith.

Jesus said, "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe". Much like with Thomas who would not believe that our Lord had risen until he personally saw the wounds on his hands and in his side, often the human mind needs proof. Jesus simply tells him to go home and that his child is healed.

I can imagine how hard it was for this man to accept Jesus' word and to just go home. His son wasn't there with him, and Jesus had not had direct contact with him. There was no healing ritual, no medicine given, just the Word of God that his son was healed. The scripture says that he started for home, and on the way, he met his own servants coming to get him. When they told him that the boy was healed, he asked what time the healing had occurred. When told that the time of the healing was the same as time that he had spoken to Jesus, he could finally believe. How often do we wait for proof rather than accepting God and trusting in Him?

### **Action**

Why is it so hard for people to have faith and to trust God? Maybe it is because so much in our fallen and broken world is untrustworthy. So much of what we see every day is false or pretends to be something it is not. When our focus is on the

world and all that is in it we lose track of who is really in charge and in whom we need to place our trust. God tells Isaiah in 41:9-10,

“You are my servant; I have chosen you and not cast you off. Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.”

We must be diligent, but it is important to understand that we can, and must, trust in the Lord.

Whatever question we have, He has an answer for us. Whatever pain we suffer, He can offer comfort. Whatever trouble or hardship we face, He can help us overcome it. It is our faith that solidifies this trust, through reading of scripture, through prayer and through community with others. Through faith, we know that He does not fail us, even when there is no immediate proof.

Learning to trust God is a very freeing way to live, it takes away all the self-doubt and stress. An old mentor of mine, Fr. Bob, used to tell me to always put “not mine, but thy will be done” on the end of every prayer I make to God. By stating this I am reminding myself that none of this is about me. When we reach out to God, we can be assured that he hears our prayer and knows what is best for us at that time. Understanding this and trusting God is important and learning how to be still and patient is transformational.

So how can we begin to learn to trust God in our lives?

### **Don't trust in man, trust in God.**

Proverbs 3:5 (RSV) states, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight.” The world has taught us to rely on our own thoughts, our own reason and to listen to our emotions, but God teaches us “to acknowledge Him in all ways, and He will make straight our paths.” (Proverb 3:6) We need to trust in the life God has called us to live and to trust in Him to go ahead of us and clear the obstacles from our path. Romans 11:33 says “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!” Trusting God completely can be very difficult, and it requires that we put aside our own plans and expectations and surrender to what God wills of us. It requires patience as we may not know the timetable that God is using.

## **Pray.**

Surrendering to God and trusting Him with our lives begins with prayer. We pray to God, and we acknowledge that His ways are higher than ours, his thoughts are not our thoughts, and neither are our ways His ways. (Isaiah 55:8) We must ask the Holy Spirit to guide us, teach us and move us in ways that glorify God. We pray that we “show forth our praise not only with our lips but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to thy service.” We pray for comfort, for strength and for the ability to deal with whatever life has brought before us.

As Psalm 55:17 reminds us, “Evening and morning and at noon, I utter my complaint and moan, and He will hear my voice.” Pray not just for what you need from God but as you pray reflect on His trustworthiness. Remember all the prayers that have been answered and the blessings that flow from Him. Be thankful and speak good of His name.

## **Recognize evil and make God first place in your life.**

Learning to trust God means turning away from sin and understanding that sin separates us from God. We all share a proclivity to sin and keeping “the desires of the flesh, the lust in our eyes and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16) away from us is the key. St. John reminds us that these things are of the world and not of the Father. When we dwell in earthly things we will stray from God. James 4:4 says, “Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 1:4) Rebuking sin and leading the life Jesus taught us to live is extremely difficult but leaning into God, trusting in His Word, and avoiding situations that tempt us will bring us renewed life and eternal, rather than temporal, rewards.

## **Conclusion**

Learning to trust God means making Him the main priority in your life. It means reading the Word of God and applying it to everything that we do every day. It means asking God for help when we struggle with temptation. It means having patience when things are not going how we want them to and trusting that God is still in control. It means being disciplined to read the Bible each day and pray to God even if we feel like He is not listening. It means accepting that God may have a different, or higher way of working in our lives. It means trusting our lives to God and being thankful for all the blessings we have. It means understanding that all these blessings came from God. It means listening to the Holy Spirit and having a heart open to learning, to guidance and to change.

Like my own father, God our Heavenly Father, is standing under that tree, and walking beside us in life. We can trust that He will always be there for us when we need Him.

To the only wise God, our Savior, be glory, majesty, dominion, and power, now and forever. Amen