



## *Restored*

Rev. Jen Porter

2 Kings 5:1-14

**The Second Sunday of Easter**

**April 3, 2016**

When we listen to scripture, we pay close attention to who God is and what God is saying to us. Today, as we hear and see, we watch for what each of these characters knows about God and where they find themselves in relation to God. And, as we listen, maybe we will learn something about ourselves and about the world. That is our hope, that we will be changed.

Our cross remains in the chancel this week; Easter is fresh in our hearts. We remember that Christ's resurrection transformed this world and changes those who are living.

Let us pray:

Speak to us, Holy One, and send your Spirit to restore our lives in you. We are ready to receive your Word. Amen.

Listen for the Word of God...

*(As translated by Rev. Sarah Juist's Hebrew class)*

2 Kings 5:1-14

SETTING / CONFLICT

<sup>1</sup>Naaman was a general in the army of the King of Aram. The man was renowned among those serving his lord, the king. His face was lifted high because through him YHVH had given victory to Aram. The man was a hero; he was charismatic; he was afflicted.

<sup>2</sup>The King of Aram had sent out raiding parties, and they took captive a little girl from the land of Israel. The girl served the wife of Naaman.

RISING ACTION

Scene 1

<sup>3</sup>She said to her mistress:

If only my lord could be in the service of the prophet in Samaria—he could cure him of his affliction.

Scene 2

<sup>4</sup>Naaman entered the palace and told his lord:

Thus and so said the girl from the land of Israel.

<sup>5</sup>The King of Aram said,

Go! Enter the land of Israel! I will send a letter to the King of Israel.

So he went, and he took in his hand ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold, and ten outfits of expensive clothing.

*Because sermons are prepared with an emphasis on verbal presentation, the written accounts may occasionally stray from proper grammar and punctuation.*

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### Scene 3

<sup>6</sup>He brought the letter to the King of Israel. It said:

... And now, as this letter has come to you, see that I have sent to you Naaman, my servant. You must cure him of his affliction.

<sup>7</sup>When the King of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes, and he said:

Am I a god that I have power over a person's living and dying? This king demands that I heal a man of his affliction! Be on the alert, all of you! This king sets a trap for me!

### Scene 4

<sup>8</sup>When Elisha, the man of God, heard that the King of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a messenger to the king, saying:

Why have you torn your clothes? Let the man come to me; let him know that there is a prophet in Israel.

<sup>9</sup>So Naaman came—with his horses and his chariot—and he stood outside the gate of the house belonging to Elisha. <sup>10</sup>Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying:

Be on your way! Wash seven times in the Jordan! Your flesh shall return to you. Now be clean!

<sup>11</sup>Naaman became enraged. He went away and he said:

Behold, did I not say to myself: The prophet will come out respectfully; he will place himself in my service; he will call on the name of the Lord, his God; he will wave his hand over the infected place; he will cure the afflicted one. <sup>12</sup>Are not the Amanah and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, purer than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?

Naaman turned homeward and went away in a bullish rage. <sup>13</sup>But his servants approached him; they talked with him, and they said:

My father, if the prophet had asked of you some great deed, would you not have done it? He simply asked of you to wash and be clean.

### CLIMAX

### Scene 5

<sup>14</sup>Naaman went down, and he dipped in the Jordan seven times, according to the word of the man of God. His flesh returned to him like the flesh of a little boy. Naaman was clean.

### DÉNOUEMENT

### Scene 6

He returned to the man of God—he and all his company—and he came and he stood before him. He said,

Hear me, please—I know that there is no god in all the earth as there is in Israel. Now, please take gifts from your servant.

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And Elisha said,

By the life of the Lord, in whose service I stand, I will not take anything.

He urged him to take, and he refused.

And Naaman said,

If not, please let this be given to your servant: two mule-loads of soil. For your servant will no longer make sacrifices or offerings for sacrifices to any others than the Lord.

But in this one matter, may the LORD forgive your servant. When my master goes to the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my arm, and I bow down in the house of Rimmon—when I bow down in the house of Rimmon, may the Lord please forgive your servant in this matter.

And he said to him,

Go in peace.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

\* \* \*

This story is a microcosm of the world. Here we see the power of the world and the power of God, and we learn how we are oriented to both. Naaman doesn't go to the prophet in Samaria; he goes to the king. But that's not where power is found.

We've been talking a lot about names throughout this season. In this story, the two main characters are named are Naaman and Elisha. Elisha is the "man of God," the one who speaks the words of God, the one through whom God's power comes. For us, Ardath, who portrayed Elisha, is the "woman of God." And our other main character, Naaman, portrayed by Josh, goes from being Naaman the wealthy, charismatic war hero to being Naaman the servant of Elisha, the servant of the Lord.

This story is about Naaman and God, about the power of the world and the power of God.

As it turns out, Naaman needs to listen not to the kings, but to a string of unnamed servants. It was an unnamed servant girl from the land of Israel who speaks up, "*If only My Lord was in the service of the prophet in Samaria. He could cure him of his affliction.*" She knows that there is power in Israel. The word that comes to the distraught king of Israel is from another unnamed servant. "*Why have you torn your cloths?*" They both know that there is a prophet in Israel. Another unnamed servant meets Naaman at the gate of Elisha's house and tells him to wash and be clean. And then, Naaman's unnamed servant stops him and turns him around saying, "*My Father, if the prophet has asked of you some great deed, would you not have done it? He simply asked of you to wash and be clean.*"

You see, it's not hard to go down into the river. But going down to wash and be clean requires a lot. Naaman has to put down everything he's carrying. He has to put down his wealth, he has to put down his pride, he even has to put down his bullish rage that has a grown man stomping his feet around and turning away to

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storm off back towards home. Naaman doesn't have any idea what he needs until he finds it. He needed to set down a lot of things that didn't matter and to face things within himself that he didn't want to.

This week, my voice and this service are bridges into sabbatical season. We've been talking about it and preparing for it for a while, and now it's here. Leaving required Chandler to set down many things. It was a process of trusting others with what and who he cares for and loves. It required him to even close down his email and take it off his phone and his computer so that he can go into this sabbatical space free and undistracted. It wasn't easy. The last thing he did was to come in on Wednesday and clean his office. He organized and sorted and hung pictures partly because he's wanted to do that for a while and partly because it's the space that his friends will be using when they come to preach for us. But I think it was also a physical act of preparing, of setting down and letting go.

*"My Father, if the prophet had asked of you some great deed, would you not have done it? He simply asked of you to wash and be clean."* It's not a difficult task, but it requires of us a lot. We have to face things in ourselves that sometimes we don't want to. But when we do, we find we never knew what we needed until we find it.

Last Sunday, we let it just be Easter, and we didn't mention sabbatical. Session and staff sent him out this past week, but why don't we pray him on his way right now. Shall we?

Gracious God, may Chandler enter these months of sabbatical and find himself unencumbered. May he find things along the way that he never knew he needed. And may you bless him on his way. Amen.

And how about us? What should we set down and pick up as we begin this season of sabbatical? Where in the world are we?

Well, our Mission and Vision team is getting close. They have been working to draft a new mission statement that names what we feel God calling us to. They've listened to us at the congregational meeting and at the leadership lunch with the deacons and trustees and elders. And one of the things that clearly emerged was that we want the new statement to sufficiently challenge us. We have said that we don't want to become comfortable in this lovely worship and rich community that Westminster is. We're not sure where that might take us, but it might require us to face some things in ourselves that we might not want to. And it might require us to set some things down.

Where in the world are we now?

We've been having a conversation about race, and we've been calling it Black Lives Matter. Ever since Martin Luther King Sunday, the Justice and Peace committee has had a table with different books and articles and with Black Lives Matter signs. And we know that we don't all feel the same way about that phrase, we don't understand it the same way, and that's ok, because we need to listen to one another and we need to speak up. The Session published a statement when we started this conversation. They knew that if we did this we would need to follow through for a long time in some very tangible ways. Their rationale said this:

We cannot post signs that read "Black Lives Matter" without accepting the demand that doing so places on the congregation. We do not know how far that demand will carry us. However, our life

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together must be converted so that it demonstrates the truth of this claim in material form. Therefore, we are committed to developing a variety of additional actions, including an invitation to dialogue about the issues raised by this document.

In fear and trembling we must look inward, ready to acknowledge the ways we are implicated in our society's injustice. We must confess, acknowledging our own complicity in the denial and degradation of God's image in ourselves and in others—not only through personal sin, but also through the institutions we create and sustain and from which we benefit. And we must repent, working in hope toward new, more just and equitable forms of common life.

So far, what's emerged is that we need to listen well. We need to find places where we can go and share experiences and develop relationships. We need to find places to join and support and not to lead. This conversation requires us to face things in ourselves that we might not want to face or even know how to face.

Where are we now?

Next week, we host members of First Presbyterian Church in Benton Harbor. Their pastor, Laurie Hartzell, is coming to preach, and she's bringing with her a number of people from her congregation. A group of us went down and worshiped with the Benton Harbor congregation this fall, and now a group of them are coming to worship with us. And we believe that this conversation about race is one that they can help us with. If we're willing. If we're interested. If we get to know them enough so that they, from their experience of doing ministry together with a strong mix of black and white members, can share deeply.

*"My Father, if the prophet had asked of you some great deed, would you not have done it? He simply asked of you to wash and be clean."* It's not a difficult task, but it requires of us a lot. We have to face things in ourselves that sometimes we don't want to. But when we do, we find what we never knew we needed.

And right now, we are here at this table, where we know that Christ's resurrection changed the living, and where we are all invited to let go of what we are carrying. Sometimes this table requires us to face things in ourselves that we don't want to. But when we let go, we find the way to freedom and to being restored.

### *Blessing the Bread, the Cup*

by Jan Richardson

Let us bless the bread  
that gives itself to us  
with its terrible weight,  
its infinite grace.

Let us bless the cup  
poured out for us  
with a love that drenches,  
that makes us anew.

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Let us gather  
around these gifts  
    simply given  
and deeply blessed.  
And then let us go  
bearing the bread,  
    carrying the cup,  
    laying the table  
within a hungry world.