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We hear a part of the story of Naaman and Elisha in the Old Testament lesson this morning. Naaman was *captain of the host of the king of Syria, a great man with his master, and honorable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria, a mighty man of valor*. Naaman was a great general, a commander, a chief and a national hero, but despite his power and greatness, Naaman was a leper. A condition which we remember had no medical cure in Bible days. However, Naaman had taken a prisoner of war, a little maiden girl, from Israel and given her as a servant to his wife. The servant girl knew of the great wonder-working prophet Elisha, and somehow, this little girl convinced not only Naaman's wife that Elisha could work a miracle for Naaman, but also the king of Syria.

And so, this great national hero, the chief and commander of the armies of Syria, was sent down to Israel at his king's command, and at the prompting of a little servant girl. Imagine how much pride Naaman had to swallow. He was already stricken with a terrible disease; everyone knew this great man had leprosy and kept their distance. And now he was asked to obey the advice of a little girl he had taken prisoner. Even to see the holy man Elisha, a wild man, who lived in Samaria, among a people the Jews considered unclean, would humble Naaman. He was called to humble himself before many before he would be healed.

So, Naaman traveled to Elisha's house and stood at the door only to find that the great prophet would not even come to talk to him but sent a messenger to greet him instead. I like to think the prophet Elisha was playing the part of the holy fool. He called Naaman down from the perch of his perceived power and influence by sending a messenger to talk to the great man who stood at the door of his own house. And the message was that Naaman must go wash himself seven times in the River Jordan, and he would be healed. Naaman was infuriated for he expected Elisha to come speak with him himself and to heal him himself, and he was told to go bathe in the river inferior to all the beautiful rivers in Syria. Thus, Naaman's pride was pricked again and he, the great general and national hero, almost walked away from Elisha's remedy, but after his servants convinced him he went and washed himself in the Jordan River just as Elisha had commanded. Naaman was healed of his leprosy, his skin was restored, and he returned to Elisha and gave thanks to God and confessed that there was no other God except for the God of Israel.

In this morning's Gospel we meet another leper. Jesus was passing through Samaria on His way to Jericho where He met ten lepers. The ten lepers came down the dusty Samaritan road calling after Him, *Jesus, Master, have mercy on us*. Like Elisha, Jesus did not lay His hands on them. He did not call upon God the Father in front of them in dramatic display. He simply said, *go and show yourselves to the priests*. The nine Jewish lepers would have gone to their priests to be examined and declared clean, no longer lepers, and then to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving. The Samaritan leper, though, would have had to go to his own Samaritan temple. The lepers simply did as they were commanded, and as they went on their way their leprosy was cleansed. Imagine their joy and relief as they learned that finally they could enter into a normal form of life and rejoin their families. But one leper, who would always be religiously and ritually unclean because he was a Samaritan, stopped and thanked His Lord for his healing, prostrating himself at the Lord's feet in that dusty road. Unlike Naaman he had no pride to swallow, nor did he have any power and prestige to protect and defend. His pride had been beaten out of him after years of being a leprous outcast. And, yet, because of His gratitude and humility, he would be rewarded and would be made whole in a deeper spiritual way from

the moment of his thanksgiving and gratitude. Like the Good Samaritan we heard about last week, even though his religion was not considered to be “pure” in the eyes of the Jews, he and his people did often seem in Jesus’ day to be closer to righteousness than his own Jewish people. This Samaritan leper like the Good Samaritan seemed closer to God. He seemed even able to take to heart the Great Commandment: *Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your mind, and with all of your soul...and your neighbor as yourself.*

We see in the stories of Naaman and the grateful Samaritan that our healing, whether it be physical or spiritual requires humility, swallowing our pride, and the remedy received with gratitude. We must learn along with Naaman, that we cannot be cleansed of the spiritual leprosy of sin on our own terms, God does not work that way. And often, before the healing can take effect, before we can be cleansed, our besetting sins, which in the case of Naaman was his pride, and desire for power and influence, must be repented of. Naaman would not have been healed had he not listened to the messenger, had he went his way and tried to bathe himself in a more beautiful Syrian river. But by following the prophet Elisha’s directions he was healed of his leprosy, and his disbelief, and he received a revelation of Almighty God. In contrast, the lepers in this morning’s Gospel did exactly as they were told. They left Jesus and went straight to the temple priests. But the Samaritan alone stopped, turned back and praised God and he was made whole, physically and spiritually. While the other lepers were only cleansed of their leprosy. We remember that elsewhere Jesus asks, *which is it greater to say, thy sins be forgiven thee, or take up thy bed and walk?* The stories of Naaman and the ten lepers teach us that it is greater to heal the soul, to make one whole spiritually and physically, than to just heal the physical body.

And so this morning we pray, *Almighty and Everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope and charity: and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love that which thou dost command. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*