

Messenger Says 2 Kings 5:1-15a

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house. 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. "But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. 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?" So he turned and went away in a rage.

Naaman gets all bent out of shape because Elisha didn't come out to deal with him in person, he sent a messenger who speaks to him and tells him what to do.

Can you hear him? "What is this? I come all the way from Damascus to see this prophet, this holy man, this shaman, and he doesn't even give me the respect of coming out and talking to me himself? Who does he think I am? I am the reigning general of all Syria, the right-hand man of the King of Syria, and he sends a lowly messenger out to me? He cannot come and talk to me Himself? Am I supposed to listen to a messenger?"

Dear friends, how do you respond the messenger? How do you respond to what the messenger says? You all know the phrase, "don't shoot the messenger." And yet, how often do we shoot the messenger? OK, maybe we do not literally shoot the messenger, but by how we respond to what the messenger tells us, it amounts to that idea?

Our Epistle proclaimed, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Paul, as God's messenger, quotes the previous messengers Moses and Solomon, to bring again to us this message from God. Obviously, God sent His messengers to bring this Word from Him, to His people in Rome. And, as it is now in the Scripture, Paul is a messenger to you through this letter.

So, how do we respond to the messenger? Do you listen to the messenger? Do you forgive your enemies? Do you love those who despise you?

By the way, Jesus said the same thing when He preached.

I know, forgiving your enemies is tough. By the way, I've said the same thing. In fact, God has sent me as His messenger to tell you all kinds of things. Some of those things I am supposed to be telling you are not things I want to tell you. Why? Because I don't want to be shot.

OK, maybe nobody here will shoot me, but some will think, “He has the audacity to tell us what to do and what not to do, to call us sinners and tell us to repent? He has the hutzpah to tell us that some of our *favorite things to do* are sins? Who does he think he is? (*make hand into gun and point at own head*) If he doesn’t do what I want, I’m going to take my offering and go home!” (*make gunshot noise*)

So, Naaman stands at Elisha’s door waiting for Elisha to come out. But Elisha sends out a messenger who tells him, “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean.”

Naaman doesn’t like this word from God. He doesn’t like it because it came from the messenger, not the prophet. Of course, the prophet is nothing more than a messenger too. Naaman would have been more impressed if Elisha himself had told him to do it. Or better yet, if the prophet had come out and waved his hand over him.

But, God is wiser than that, His Spirit moves Elisha to send a messenger, and Elisha stays hidden, not going to Naaman himself. Naaman is forced to trust the Word of God spoken, not the man.

After some verbal jousting with his servants, that he should do as the Word has suggested, Naaman goes and does as he was told by the messenger – he trusts the word of the messenger, because of whose word the messenger speaks. And in so doing, he is cleansed of his leprosy.

Do you trust the Word of God’s messenger? Are you a sinner in need of repentance? Do you do works in keeping with repentance?

do you trust the word of the messenger which proclaims you forgiven?

Do you trust what the messenger says? Do you trust that by speaking the Word, miraculous things happen?

In today’s church, there are many who do not trust the Word of God brought by the messenger. There are an amazing number of pastors who do not even trust the Word that God has proclaimed they are to deliver. Instead of trusting that the Holy Spirit actually works through the Word they have been commanded to speak, they try to add all sorts of things to it, just like Naaman wanted. Pastors are willing to try all sorts of gimmicks to get people to come to their church – they do not trust that God’s Word can work miracles.

We come today wanting great things. You want a great sermon, but you are stuck listening to me. But that’s the point. Naaman came seeking a healing for leprosy – that the great prophet himself would come out and wave his hand over the leper and heal him.

Leprosy, throughout the Bible is a reminder of sin, it is an uncleanness, a disease that slowly rots a person to death. Were there no sin, there would be no leprosy. Leprosy is simply one outward manifestation showing the inward condition of sinfulness.

And sinfulness is like leprosy in that it is an uncleanness that can consume and rot a person unto

death – that is, eternal death. Life needs to break in and bring healing both to lepers and to sinners.

It is the Word of God, that is, Christ Jesus Himself who does such great things. Jesus is the One who died to purchase forgiveness, and grant healing unto eternal life. He says, “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” (Luke 10:16) When we hear the word of the messenger, the word works miraculous things.

What brought Naaman healing? His sinfulness was forgiven, washed clean with his leprosy, for he heard the Word of God from the messenger. The Spirit, at work in the Word he heard, moved him to faith that acted upon that word in obedience. And, He was healed! He was healed of leprosy and of sinfulness! It was the holy precious blood and the innocent suffering and death of the only begotten Son of God that brought him healing. The cost of sin was paid in the blood shed by the Son of God.

How can it happen that the sacrifice of Jesus could affect things long before He was even born, much less before the sacrifice was made by Christ? That question could apply to us as well, how can Christ’s sacrifice so long ago have any meaning or bring any help to us today, for after all, we were not there when they crucified our Lord?

Maybe it was Naaman who inspired Luther to write his third question about baptism, “How can water do such great things?” We know what Naaman did not know, that it is certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God’s word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit.

Water and the Word today bring about a miracle. Caleb Walter is cleansed of sin and made a holy child of God. The messenger speaks the Word commanded to be spoken, and God works in the Word to bring about magnificent things. No, it doesn’t look like much, just a little water sprinkled upon a child’s head, but as we know, it is a baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

It is the Word which brings about great and miraculous things. God uses water, bread, wine, and allows His Word to pass through even the lips of your pastor so that miraculous things can happen.

Naaman eventually humbled himself for the Word of God had its way with him. His own servant continued to speak God’s Word to him, to go and wash in the Jordan, and he believed the Word of God. How do we know he believed? He washed himself seven times as instructed. And God’s Word through Elisha, and Elisha’s messenger was fulfilled, Naaman was cleansed. Healing took place! And it came about that God did great things, Naaman of Syria, Naaman the unclean, gentile unbeliever became a child of God. We know this because in the verse immediately following today’s Old Testament lesson we read Nathan’s confession of faith, “Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.”

That he became a believer is the greater miracle than the fact that his leprosy was cleansed.

That Word of God is still working today as God's messengers speak as He commands. You are cleansed of sin in the word you hear, made whole unto eternal life. That Word brings about the reality of feeding you Christ's very own body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. The Word of God is spoken, His name put upon you, and God Himself blesses you.

Nothing exciting takes place. It is simply a messenger who speaks the Word of God, but the Word of God does great and marvelous things.

You are cleansed of sin.

You are made a believer in Christ, a child of God through Water and the Word.

You are fed and nourished to eternal life on the body and blood of Christ.

Yes, that Word of God does great things to you – now and forever more. Amen.