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The Lesson from Morning Prayer includes a portion of the story of Naaman the leprous Syrian General who was healed by obeying Elisha the prophet. It is an interesting story. Naaman is a Syrian General, and obvious enemy to Israel, and yet this mighty man of valor has an incurable case of leprosy. He is so desperate to be cured of the disease that he listens to the little Israelite servant girl he had captured from the last raid. Imagine his desperation, that he would pay attention when a little captive servant girl says, *Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! For he would recover him of his leprosy.* And the general listened to the little girl and sent a servant into the land that he had raided to talk to a prophet in a part of that country that even the Jews hated, to speak to none other than the great prophet Elisha, the protégé of Elijah.

This upset the King of Israel so much that Naaman himself came and stood in the door of the Prophet Elisha. Elisha sends a messenger to him and tells him to wash seven times in the River Jordan and he will be healed. But this sends Naaman into a fit. In his pride he expected something more dramatic, saying, *I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean? So, he turned and went away in a rage.* Naaman had a point, the Jordan River is more of what we would call a creek, the water is muddy, and the flies are awful. But again, the little servant girl speaks up and says, *My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather then when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?*

This great man, the General of Syria, finally humbles himself enough to take the little servant girl's advice and washes seven times in the Jordan River. He is completely healed, and his skin is restored. He returns to the prophet intending to reward him with silver, garments, and mules, but Elisha will take no reward for the work of the Lord. Before Naaman returns to Syria he converts and promises that he will not offer burnt offerings nor sacrifices to other gods, but only unto the Lord. As he begins his journey home he is followed by Elisha's servant, Gehazi. Gehazi cannot believe that Elisha did not take any reward from Naaman, so he decides to go and take advantage of him. He runs to Naaman and lies to him asking for two changes of garments and a talent of silver. Naaman is generous and gives twice as much as Gehazi asked for. Gehazi returned to the prophet's house and stood before Elisha who asked him where he had been. Gehazi denied it, and Elisha answered, *went not my heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money and to receive garments...The leprosy there of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed forever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.*

*The story from the Old Testament is almost like a parable.* Naaman was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper, and to how many men in the world's history do these words apply. They were mighty in intellect, mighty in capacity, but they were not whole and sound of soul. The root of Naaman's troubles, aside from the physical disease of leprosy, is the spiritual disease of pride. Naaman is so desperate for a cure that he takes the advice of a servant girl, he seeks out his

healing from a strange man, a prophet, in a strange part of a nation he has raided. And the prophet humbles him even further by sending his servant to go and talk to him, and make him wash in a muddy, dirty creek. Naaman is healed by learning humility, by learning to surrender the flesh to the Law of the Spirit.

St. Paul outlines for us the spiritual leprosy of the flesh; adultery, fornications, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, and revellings. The works of the flesh are the sins which have infected the greatest of men and women and entangled and marred their good reputations. Naaman appears to be healed of his physical and spiritual leprosy at the same time. This morning's Gospel lesson is a fulfillment of this story. Jesus, one greater than the prophets, heals not by sending a messenger to relay his words, but through His words alone. And as they go on their way, to fulfill the law of the flesh, the Law of Moses, they are cleansed. Only one, and a Samaritan at that, turns and falls down at Jesus' feet. The grateful leper who is cleansed in this morning's Gospel was already on his way to spiritual healing, for only a heart attuned to the law of the Spirit would be able to remember in the excitement of the moment *that it is meet, right, and our bounden duty...in all times and in all places...to give thanks.*

Physical and spiritual leprosy are not just hard to cleanse but highly contagious. It is not promised that the other nine lepers from today's Gospel, who did not stop to thank Jesus was made completely whole, in body and soul. And then there is Elisha's servant, Gehazi, who says as he watches Naaman ride into the sunset, *as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him.* Gehazi gives into the law of the flesh, and what little fruit there might have been in his life from serving the great prophet Elisha, withers. In a single moment he trades love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance for envy and pride. He is leprous from the inside out.

Today we have a cure for physical leprosy, and we have had a cure all along for spiritual leprosy. But what does it take to be healed? It takes humility, and obedience to this law of the Spirit. This does not just affect the problem of sin though, for if we seek a greater meaning to life we will be directed to this law of the Spirit and its fruit. The longing to be healed, the longing for meaning is still the longing of many a man and woman in our modern world. In spite of all that they possess they are sick at heart, and they know that they are. The friction and the pressure of life always bring with them many impurities which mere appeal to reason cannot remedy. For reason alone cannot overcome a sense of unworthiness. And when it comes to this washing of the soul, this cure of life at its center, there is no substitute for the old river Jordan. Culture can do much, but it cannot do this. As simple, contrite-hearted men and women, we must go and wash in this Jordan if we would be clean.

But this demands much of the modern man, just as it did of Naaman and the grateful Samaritan. They conquered their pride, stifled their vanity, and Naaman, proud soldier that he was went down and dipped not once, but seven times in the Jordan River, just as the grateful Samaritan fell down at the feet of Jesus and worshipped. Pride, and only pride, keeps many a

modern Naaman from receiving the blessing which came to the ancient Syrian. If we can but forget our pride, put off our intellectual harness and critical apparatus, and go right down into the stream of the life-giving life of God, then our flesh too will come to us as the flesh of a little child. If each week we bathe our souls in a real sabbath and in worship in the sanctuary, if each day we dip into the Bible and know real moments of consecrating prayer, then the miracle will be wrought for us as truly as it was for Naaman and the grateful Samaritan.