

## Can There Be Healing Without Humility?

Epiphany 6B - February 12, 2012

A preacher buys a lawnmower from a neighbor of his, but he can't get it to run. He goes to his neighbor and says, "Why can't I get the lawnmower to work?" The neighbor says, "Oh, to get it to work, you have to curse at it." The preacher says, "But, I haven't cursed in over thirty years!" The neighbor says, "In that case, just keep trying to start it. It'll all come back to you!"

Last Sunday we talked about thriving; what it will require of us to thrive as a parish community: a deeper commitment to our relationship with God & our mission; chronic curiosity & a hunger to learn; & a willingness to take risks. Today, both scripture lessons invite us into a conversation about what it takes to find healing in our lives. Another word for healing is restoration, to restore someone or something to health, to a sense of well-being & vitality, to the way we were created to be. What is necessary for healing & restoration to take place when someone has been deeply hurt or injured? What is required when two people or two groups of people are divided & hold enmity in their hearts for one another? The answer seems to always involve humility, holding an humble attitude & avoiding taking a position that closed off, defensive, arrogant & superior.

Let's look at the characters in our Old Testament story to see different examples of humility in action. There were 3 very important, successful, powerful "men of the world" in this story: the king of Aram, the commander of Aram's army - a great general Naaman who suffered from leprosy, and the king of Israel (who seemed to have quite a temper). Naaman & the two kings were powerful men. Wherever they went, people got out of their way, bowed & paid homage. They were accustomed to being in charge, to having others do exactly what they said, to having control, honor, prestige & status. They were on top of the world, full of pride & self-regard. But it's worth noting, when faced with the challenge of conquering & having their way with the disease of leprosy, they were clueless, powerless, blind & helpless. It seems that neither their power, wealth, success nor prestige could produce the kind of wisdom that makes healing & restoration possible. It seems that the key to healing & restoration was neither a big ego nor a great title, neither great popularity nor great affluence. If not these things, then what?

Who had the key to a new life? Who possessed the wisdom necessary to bring restoration to Naaman's body? It was "the least of these," the servants. It was the servant girl, the slave of Naaman's wife who suggested to her mistress that Naaman travel from Aram to Samaria to seek out the prophet of God there. But the clueless general gets the message wrong which he relays to his clueless king. You see, both of these men continued to operate out of their own value system; a system that prioritized wealth over wisdom, power over humility, status over faith. And so it never crossed Naaman's mind that he should be sent to anyone other than the king of Israel. And it never crosses the mind of either Naaman or his king that healing & restoration lie outside their secular economy, beyond the frame of "business as usual." They simply assumed that spiritual

wholeness was like everything else they valued, an object for sale, commodities that could be purchased. And because this mindset, Naaman remained blind, deaf & dumb to the values of the Kingdom of God.

So what does he do? Instead of humbly heading off to Samaria to ask God's prophet Elisha for healing, he loads up a caravan full of gold, silver & fine garments to take to the king of Israel. There, he thinks, one rich & powerful person will purchase his healing from another very rich & powerful person. After all, that's how the world works. That's how the world is supposed to work. The only problem was, that is not how God works. And so Naaman arrives at the palace of the king of Israel only to find disappointment, anger & rejection. Remember that song: "Lookin' for Love in All the Wrong Places"? Naaman's big ego & secular values were leading him to look for love, healing & restoration in all the wrong places & his wounds were multiplied.

When he finally arrives at the home of the Prophet Elisha, he is expecting the red carpet to be rolled out for him. Of course, he is the great general. At his command, Elisha will issue the order to God & God will obediently comply with Naaman's healing right there on the spot. But instead of the scenario he had already worked out in his head, the red carpet is nowhere to be found. Elisha does not even come out to meet him, to bend the knee, to pay homage. Instead, Elisha sent someone else to advise Naaman to go to the Jordan river & wash himself seven times. Well Naaman is furious, outraged, irate at being treated like he was an ordinary person. He threw a temper tantrum, stomped his feet & headed for home. And who came to save the day? It was Naaman's servants. It was the men who knew what it was like to humble themselves, to live day to day without ego, prestige & control, to live in the constant presence of their own powerlessness. It is from these men, these "nobodies" excluded & unknown that the voice of wisdom was heard, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more when all he said to you was, 'Wash & be clean?'"

Hearing these words, something happened inside of Naaman. Some kind of repentance took hold that allowed him to turn around & begin traveling in a different direction. Perhaps he sensed the love & concern his servants authentically had for him? Perhaps he was able to recognize the voice of wisdom when he heard it? Perhaps he simply did not want to return to Aram still a leper? But for some reason, Naaman chose to humble himself, to let go of his role as "the big man," to bend his knees before God & do as God's prophet instructed him to do. In doing so, he moved himself from demanding that God operate by his rules to submitting himself to the rules of the Kingdom, from his former world of ego & power to the spiritual world of humility, love & devotion, and thereby, from sickness & brokenness to healing & restoration. Whether you place of pain, brokenness & separation lies within your physical body, your relationships with others, or your own soul, the key to healing & restoration is a humility that says, "Here I am, Lord. I will do whatever you ask." AMEN.