

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the One who can heal our sin sick soul, Jesus Christ our Savior, amen.

Do you remember those TV shows that were so popular a few years ago where they would do a complete make-over of a person? Some of them would deal with the person's weight, others their clothes, and still others used invasive medicine such as plastic surgery, Lasix eye surgery, dermabrasion, implants, reconstructive dental procedures, and a host of other medical procedures to complete the extreme makeover. I remember PJ being a big fan of those "Reality" shows... A similar genre still popular today are all the Home Makeover Shows. On all these shows the idea is always the same; you can become a totally different, better person simply by wearing better clothing, losing weight, having better teeth or better skin. We're led to understand that by undergoing an extreme makeover we can be radically different and more beautiful people. Well – maybe, if all that is important is on the outside!

Our scripture for today tells the story of a man in need of an extreme makeover. His name was Naaman. He was the commanding General of the army of Aram. He had led his troops to victory in many campaigns. Some of those battles were undoubtedly conventional army on army warfare. Other smaller scale battles involved leading raiding parties into the towns and villages where the soldiers would attack innocent villagers. In our scripture this morning we meet a

little girl who was most likely captured during one of these village rampages. She probably witnessed her father's murder as he defended his household and his family. Her mother was also probably brought back to Aram in slavery. The little girl had every reason to denounce the God of Israel as either dead or uncaring. Most of us would probably have changed our belief system to get along with our captors. This little girl had the faith Jesus talked about when he said we all must have the faith of a little child to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Instead of folding like a house of cards, she boldly spoke up to her master, Naaman's wife. The girl plainly and honestly shared her faith in the one true living God, YHWH. There must have been something about her quiet confidence or the way she spoke in absolute certainty that if her master's husband could only visit the great Prophet in Israel, then the God of Israel would certainly heal Naaman. I wish I had the faith of that little girl... Maybe Naaman had already tried everything else to cure his leprosy and this was a last ditch attempt to find a cure...

So, what about Naaman? What can we say about his faith and his actions in this encounter? Naaman was a great general, in charge of all the armies of his King. He had all the most modern, up to date medical and spiritual medicines known at the time. Naaman was a wealthy man and could afford the best medical care available. He was well respected and honored by both his men under his command and also of his boss, the king. Yet nothing could be done about his

disease, leprosy. You probably already know a bit about this dread disease, but as I was studying for this sermon I discovered a few new tidbits. Leprosy was a terminal condition. It started out as a rash, but soon progressed. After a while, the nerves began to die and the person would lose all feeling in their extremities. After that, the skin and underlying flesh would begin to rot. The victim would lose their fingers and toes. As the leprosy progressed, the patient's teeth would fall out and their eyes would rot right in their sockets. It was a slow, painful, prolonged death. Naaman was apparently in the beginning stages of this disease.

After being told of this great God and His Prophet in Israel, Naaman does not go directly to Elisha, but first visits his own King. Now just like in the Nursery Rhyme Humpty Dumpty, all the King's horses and all the King's men couldn't put Naaman back together again. So, Naaman asked his king for a letter of introduction to the King of Israel. That's where he went instead of heading off straight to the Prophet Elisha's house. He still thought the cure for his disease was in the hands of earthly kings and kingdoms. To his surprise and dismay, the King of Israel redirected Naaman to Elisha where he finally ended up... When he arrived at Elisha's house he came in full military regalia. Flags unfurled, full military escort and all the pomp and circumstance Naaman had grown accustomed to, in his presence... Elisha's reaction to all this pomp and circumstance was to not even come out of the house. The God of Israel wasn't impressed... You see,

Naaman was filled with his own importance. He saw no value in humbling himself to Elisha, the God of Israel, or anyone else for that matter. He was the number one General in all the land and was entitled to at least a face to face with this Prophet.

There are so many lessons to be learned from this encounter, but so little time... I'll try to stay focused on the idea that pride keeps us from knowing God and God's healing power in our lives. Before Naaman could get the relief he sought, he first had to humble himself and acknowledge the living God who created the universe and everything in it, including you, me, and Naaman. For a man of his stature that was no easy task. When instructed by Elisha's servants to wash 7 times in the Jordan River, Naaman scoffed and was about to return home unhealed, but at least with his pride intact. That's when the story takes a turn we should all notice. Naaman's servants came to him and persuaded him to follow the simple instructions given by Elisha's servants. When Naaman put his pride aside and washed as instructed, the incurable leprosy was gone.

Sometimes our healing has to come from the inside out. Naaman's outer ailment couldn't be addressed until he let go of all the worldly ties that bound him to his disease. He first tried his own King and country's doctors who were unable to effect a cure. Then he went to the King of Israel who thought it some kind of rouse to gain an advantage in a surprise attack. Finally, as a last resort, Naaman goes to Elisha. There he must put aside all pretext to his own honor and greatness

and come before the Lord God vulnerable and naked. I know how hard that can be. We all feel the need to keep up our own façade. How many of us unthinkingly reply, “Oh, I’m fine,” every time we’re asked how we’re doing? We sit in the pews week after week refusing to remove the masks we work so hard to wear.

There’s a parable Jesus told in the Book of Luke about a Pharisee and a man who was a tax collector and sinner. The Pharisee went to the temple and prayed, thanking God he wasn’t a sinner like that tax collector. When the Tax Collector prayed he couldn’t even raise his eyes to heaven, he simply beat his chest, tore his clothes, and begged God for forgiveness. Jesus said it was the tax collector, not the prideful Pharisee who left the temple forgiven. He said all those who exalt themselves would be humbled and those who humble themselves would be exalted. Quite an upside down value system in this Kingdom of God...

May we learn from Naaman how to put aside all the incumbrances of this world and remove the mask of pride so we can likewise experience God’s mercy and forgiveness. May we learn to listen to the little children and the servants God places in our lives when we stray off the path. Finally, may we learn the lesson of Humpty Dumpty, that all the kings horses and all the kings men can’t be relied on to put us back together again, that can only be done through the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God for never giving up on Naaman and never giving up on you or me either. Amen!