

Meditation on 2. Kings 5:9-14

'Wash and Be Cleansed'

::: ONE :::

⁹[So] Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. ¹⁰Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."

Naaman is a conqueror. He is King Aram's general. And he suffers from leprosy. His wife's servant had mentioned that there might be a cure through a prophet in Israel.

So, he went there, first visiting the king of Israel – with then being called to Elisha.

That's where he is now. At the doorstep of Elisha's house.

Strangely enough, Elisha sends a messenger out to Naaman. Elisha doesn't step out to him in person.

How strange must all of this be to Naaman? A man, used to give orders, is pushed around like an apprentice.

And then the call: “Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.”

What a kind of call is this?

So ordinary.

As if washing could cure this kind of disease.

::: TWO :::

¹¹ But Naaman went away angry and said, “I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. ¹² Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn’t I wash in them and be cleansed?” So he turned and went off in a rage.

With all the travelling he took upon himself,
with being pushed around between king,
prophet and messenger,
with being asked to simply wash himself seven
times in the river Jordan, ...

... it seems that he lost track.

He was actually looking for some sort of miraculous healing.

But what he was offered as a means of curing his disease is so absolutely human.

He had expected something very different.

He had expected a personal healer to wave his hand over the spot and cure him of his leprosy.

But his expectations are not fulfilled. He feels being treated without due respect.

He gets angry, gets in rage. And suddenly something strange happens.

Suddenly his anger is not only directed to the people he is engaged with. Suddenly his anger stretches out to the land of Israel:

„Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?“

He had travelled to this land for cure. Now, in all his anger his mind seems to shrivel down to pure nationalism.

How dangerous, when in rage, the cursed card of nationalism is played.

It can be the end of everything. And surely it will make healing impossible.

For Naaman's sake, this story isn't over yet ...

::: THREE :::

¹³ Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'!"

Naaman's servants find the right tone. They go to him, addressing him "my father".

Respect and dignity they extend to him.

This changes the whole scenery. The servants' behavior and their calm and simple words seem to work like an eye opener to Naaman.

How close had he been to missing his healing out of anger and rage?

How close had he been to tear down a helpful yet fragile relationship through his eruptive nationalism?

But eventually he is now able to hear the words which lead towards healing:

“Wash and be cleansed!”

...FOUR...

“Wash and be cleansed!”

¹⁴ So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

Obviously the scenery or rather Naaman's perception has changed.

He doesn't care about dipping seven times in the water – as the man of God, as Elisha had told him through the messenger.

The servants – I think – were also very wise in stripping away any extra information, reducing the commandment to “wash and be cleansed!”

We need to listen closely to the words:

“Wash and be cleansed!”

Isn’t it interesting: Not “wash and be healed”, but “wash and be cleansed!”

But the time for arguing is over. Naaman does as called. Washes seven times in the river Jordan – and is healed. His flesh is restored – clean like that of a young boy.

He receives even more than which was to be expected.

And yet not in an obscure, miraculous way, but through God’s act of mercy in a rather familiar action – a simple ritual of cleansing.

::: FIVE :::

“Wash and be cleansed!”

Each one of us came to this place with their own load – on our shoulders, on our souls.

And as we celebrate the eucharist – or communion – today this can and is to be our moment of cleansing and healing.

Whatever wrong we have said,
whatever bad words we have spoken,
whatever wrong we have done,
whatever harm we have caused ...

... this is our moment for cleansing and healing, ...

... and our beginning of a new way of speaking out
for peace, love and hope,
... of being doers and therefore messengers of
peace, love and hope.

So, you who are weary, hear the words that Elisha
spoke to Naaman and Christ speaks to us: “Wash
and be cleansed!”

Amen.