

The Unexpected Power of the Holy
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“People are often unreasonable and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people might accuse you of ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

If you are honest, people might cheat you. Be honest anyway.

If you find happiness, people may be jealous. Be happy anyway.

The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good...

Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough. Give your best anyway.

For you see, in the end, it is between you and God.

It was never between you and them anyway.”

Those words are from Mother Teresa of Calcutta;

And I read them today, because they are the heart of our faith, always...

...and the meaning of our scripture readings, this morning.

In our readings from 2 Kings, and from Luke, we see a couple things happening.

One---from the Hebrew Bible---we pick up just a little after where we left off last week...

A few chapters down, in 2 Kings....After Elisha picked up that mantle from Elijah,

parts the waters of the Jordan by the will of God,

and moved on in his life to continue serving the All....

In chapter five, we hear about this guy—Naaman---

---commander of the army of the king of Aram [AY-ram],

He’s a mighty warrior,

but he’s just got this little *leprosy* problem he just can’t seem to shake [tongue-in-cheek].

I'd imagine it would be pretty tough being a fighter with leprosy...nevermind a good one...

Though, at the same time, you'd probably scare a lot of people away, too, while you were out there.

Anyway... Naaman's wife finds out from her servant---

---a captive from the land of Israel---about Elisha, the prophet.

The servant tells the woman that Elisha is a man of God, and by the power of God, Elisha will be able to cure her husband of his problem.

So... of course... Naaman doesn't waste any time, and trucks it over to the king, asking if he could go find Elisha for the cure.

The king lets him go, Naaman heads on over to Elisha's house,

And there he's greeted by a messenger, sent by Elisha.

The messenger brings some awesome news to Naaman.

He tells him Elisha heard his need and said, "Go wash in the Jordan River seven times, And you'll be healed."

And what does Naaman do?

Can you remember his reaction?

He gets pretty P-O'd, right?

(sorry if that sounds a little Flanders-ish. I curse, but not at the altar!)

---At this beautiful promise, this potentially amazing act...

...Naaman becomes angry. Even indignant!

Now, in the man's defense, though... he does actually think Elisha's blowing him off.

He doesn't have any *faith* in what he promised.

He thinks, first, Elisha's a jerk for not even coming out to see him,

And second, that Elisha basically just waved him away and said to him,

"Eh, go off and wash in the Jordan. That'll make ya clean..."

So he looks at the people who came all this way with him, and says,

"Whatever man. I could've just gone down to a river by my place and washed.

What's wrong with this guy?"

(Direct Quote)

Eventually, his people---people who have a little more faith

in Elisha's and Elisha's intimacy with the power of God---

---talk Naaman into trying it out.

And what happens?

The leprosy disappears. Not only does it disappear,

but Naaman's skin becomes as fresh as the skin of a child.

And friends, I've been to the Jordan River, and dunked my arm in it.

And I can tell ya it's not the water---as something special---

--that made Naaman well.

It was nothing but the power of God, and Elisha's connection

with the thoughts and movements of God,

That worked to change this man's life, in the story we read here.

And Naaman, a transformed man, knows this.

Our scripture reading from the lectionary sadly cuts off here...

...but in the verse just after---verse 15---

The Book tells us:

(2 Kings) 15 Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel. Please accept a present from your servant." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will accept nothing....Go in peace."

It's this passage, from 2 Kings,

that those words I read from Mother Teresa really touch into the heart of...

But our scripture reading from Luke brings our minds to a similar place.

In Luke, Ch 10, what happens?

Something very different, but the moment touches into the same issues, right?

It's where Jesus sends out seventy of his followers

to go spread the word about the power and love of God in the world.

But what does he say to them? Do you remember?

Does he paint a *happy* picture?

Does he make it sound like it'll be easy, in the slightest?

No way. Jesus, here, does anything but paint the picture of a walkway lined with flowers, and a glowing smile waiting at the door to meet those people sent in the cause of God.

Do you remember what he said?

From verse 3:

Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.

Not too great an intro, right?

If I was one of those people, I think I'd swallow pretty hard at that one.

But Jesus isn't there to paint over the truth with lies.

He was there to bring the reality of God and the truth of what it takes to live with God,
to the souls of the world.

And he did just that, when he said this to the seventy.

He told them to be careful. Not to linger too long in any one place.

He let them know that some will take them in, but many will scorn them, and to be prepared.

The work of God isn't easy.

So many times, in our lives, while we walk around each day,

just hoping to find---or even *make*---

--a moment to spread that love we've felt from God in our souls,

To the lives and hearts of others,

And if we're blessed to experience one of those moments, we're met with a lot of backlash, right?

A lot of anger.

For people, in general---me, you, everybody else---

it's kind of a natural inclination for us to be jerks to each other... isn't it?

And I say it's natural, because most of the time, that's our first reaction.

And unless we've reached a point in our experience of the holy

where we've been *entirely* transformed from what we were,

Operating on some kind of different spiritual plane,

we have to stifle that first reaction inside of us, and choose something better,

in the flash of a moment, don't we?

Sometimes we do this well, and sometimes we just botch it up *completely*, huh?

--One of those palms to the forehead moments.

When we look back, and decide that we'll do our best to do better, next time.

And as we grow and change through our walk with God,

we can only hope that we slap our foreheads less, and hold our arms out more, right?

...Because as followers of God, that's exactly what we're called to do.

(Love in the face of hate, care though mistreated...)

And it's also the exact *opposite* of what people expect, isn't it?

People expect things to be straight as they are. The way they're used to seeing it.

An outlined world, with predictable patterns, easy to follow.

And in these assumptions, we all get kind of caught up.

Even bored, sometimes, right?

We start losing our imagination as to what might exist past our senses. Past our expectations.

Past what we think we already *know*.

And when something happens differently from all of that, it startles us, doesn't?

Like a splash of cold water to the face,

we all of the sudden sort of snap more clearly into reality.

We realize maybe we don't have all of the answers after all!

And where does that splash of cold water leave us?

For a moment, it leaves us OPEN, doesn't it.

For a spilt second, our minds swing back their cages,
and fresh stuff is allowed in, before we close up those bars again!

And that's exactly what happens to Naaman, when he went to see Elisha, right?

Naaman reacts to the actions of that man of God really rudely. Indignantly.

Without faith. And with a lot of anger.

But Elisha doesn't go back on what he said, does he?

He lets it still happen... Just like what Mother Teresa
pleads for us to do in those words of hers I read earlier.

...Elisha does good anyway.

And Naaman, begrudgingly experiencing what Elisha has offered,

Is startled by an unexpected experience of the Holy.

And his life is changed for the better, forever.

As friends of God, we're called to walk out like sheep amongst wolves,

And bring all of the love God's left inside of us out to others to feel.

Even when we face the snarls and grinding teeth.

And man, it's not easy;

But when we do this, and we face that,

What we're led by God to do, is to react in an entirely *different* way than people expect.

---To bring love where there's hate. Calm where there's anger.

Friendship where there's animosity.

We're called to try, and to fail, and to try again to bring that moment that *startles* people.

Because in that one split second of a moment, when life isn't what people thought, after all,

And that cage door swings open in our minds,

We, together, become open to the possibility of *God*.

To a sense of something beyond us. Something beyond what we normally see.

Something past what we expect of the world.

Like Naaman, we're touched by an experience of the holy,

and that experience leaves us changed for good.

So as we walk out the door each day,

with those teachings of Jesus in the backs of our minds and down deep in our hearts,

and we step into that sometimes uninviting life around us,

Let's do our best to do better. To do good.

To let ourselves shock and *be* shocked.

Let's remember those beautiful words from that beautiful life, that said:

"Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough. Give your best anyway. For you see, in the end, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway."

Amen.

