

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany
II Kings 5:1-4,9-14
“Yes, Simple, But Hang on to Your Hat!”
February 14/15, 2009

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Heavenly Father, and from Jesus Christ, our Lord, our Savior and King. Amen.

I can remember years ago I used to worry that I wasn't saying my prayers sincerely enough. I remember lying down in bed to go to sleep and saying a prayer followed with the Lord's Prayer. And, it was, especially with the Lord's Prayer, that I would go back and pray through the words again. I guess what I was trying to do was to make sure I was fully concentrated on the words that I was actually praying and not merely reciting. I suppose I was afraid that if I wasn't fully concentrated then I wasn't sincere in what I was praying about.

I can also remember, a few years ago, someone asked me quite a serious question. The question had to do with being sure that we are sincere enough during the worship service when we confess our sins, pray, speak the words of the liturgy, and sing the hymns, etc. How do we know we are really receiving absolution that our sins are forgiven? Shouldn't we be beating our chest, and crying, and stuff when we ask for forgiveness? Shouldn't we be jumping with joy after receiving the news that we're forgiven?

I'm sure we can ask these same questions when it comes to God hearing and answering our prayers. If we're not given a clear sign that our prayers are answered, then, was there something wrong with the way we prayed? Did God even hear our prayers at all?

In our Old Testament reading we have the event of Naaman arriving at the door of Elisha's house hoping that Elisha, the prophet, the man of God, would be able to cure him of his leprosy. Naaman was a great man, a commander of the Syrian army, a man of valor. But, he was also a leper. Now, we can assume, perhaps, that because of his high ranking position he was used to having his needs met in dramatic and fantastic ways. This expectation of Naaman's was certainly true when he arrived at the door of Elisha's house. We find in verse 10 that Elisha sent out a messenger to tell Naaman that to be cured of his leprosy he simply had to go to the Jordan River and wash seven times. You

would think that if Naaman really trusted what Elisha had to say he would be overjoyed that his serious illness would be cured in such a simple way.

As we see, however, this is not Naaman's reaction. He goes away angry. Why? Because he was either expecting or hoping for some dramatic, fantastic, and dazzling show of his leprosy being cured, or he's upset because Elisha didn't come out to meet him, and, instead, sends out a messenger making Naaman feel Elisha isn't taking him seriously.

Later his servants say to him, "it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you..." "A great WORD," my friends. Now, Naaman felt the issue was that his need wasn't being met in a dramatic way, or at least the way he felt it should be met. But, really that wasn't the issue. The issue was that Naaman didn't believe the "great WORD" of Elisha.

There are numerous times in Scripture when someone is needing something from God and feels the need isn't being met because it's not being so in some dazzling way. Consider Thomas, Jesus' disciple. When the other disciples went to him that they had seen the Lord, that He had been resurrected, Thomas's response was, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." Even there, in order for the WORD the disciples spoke to him could not be true unless...

Isn't this often the way it is for us too? I think we all have to admit to this. When we are in desperate need of something, whether it be healing, comfort, help in the midst of a financial disaster, or relief from guilt or grief, we start conditioning God's help, His grace and mercy in the matter, on how we think it should happen. We start making our minds up about when, how, where, God should answer our calls for help. And, we start wanting Him to do it in ways which leaves us having to have to hang on to our hats.

Or, maybe anyone of you have either been here in worship service, or just left worship and started wondering, 'was I really sincere?' 'Did I really feel it in my heart when I confessed my sins and asked for forgiveness?' 'Did I really feel what I needed to feel when I spoke the liturgy and prayed?'

Maybe questions like that indicate that we are focused on the wrong thing. Maybe questions like this indicate that we're engrossed in our need for the dramatic, the

fantastic, and the dazzling. Isn't that what we like? That's what Naaman liked, obviously. That's what Thomas needed, obviously. Or was it?

Or, is it that we really need a Lord and Savior who promises, that no matter what, He hears our prayers and answers them, hears our confession and our pleads for mercy and forgiveness and gives it?

In our Gospel reading we heard the about the leper who came to Jesus. He said to Jesus, "If you will, you can make me clean." Notice something in his words. Was there anything that indicates the leper was expecting some dramatic, fantastic, and dazzling way for this to be done? No. The only condition for his healing was that the Lord had to be willing for it to happen.

Friends, this is true. The only condition needed for God helping us in time of need, for Him hearing our prayers and confessions and answering and responding to them, is for the Lord, Himself, to be willing to do so. If that's true the only question left is: Is He?

Consider this, for years the Israelites hoped in the Promise of a Messiah, of a King. The promise was fulfilled, if that wasn't true we wouldn't be here right now. But, was that promise met in the dramatic, fantastic, dazzling way many of the people in that time expected? Their understanding of a Messiah, of a King, wasn't exactly the way Jesus Christ came bursting into their lives. Born of humble, simple birth, lowly in a manger. We know how it happened. We recall how the soldiers treated Him right before His crucifixion. They stripped Him down, put a scarlet robe on Him, and twisted a thorn of crowns, jammed it on His head, and put a reed in His right hand. They were mocking Him because in their eyes He was not what they thought a king should be. The only exultation He received as a King was that He was raised high on a cross.

Put ourselves in the shoes who were there that day, even in the shoes of His own disciples. Is this the way we would expect our everlasting King to be treated? I believe we would all have difficulty believing Jesus' Word that He was. Because in our minds, such a King as that, should have busted into our world and our lives in some dramatic, fantastic, and dazzling way!

Yet, what did Jesus say, and continues to tell us, that all that did for us? It took care of our greatest need. We all have needs, but the need Jesus met for us, nothing

compares to that. Where would we be without what He won for us? We would have no hope! Death would still have its sting! Instead we are able to look right past our own deaths and smile because we're sure of what's coming, life with Him in paradise!

What a dramatic transformation- from being eternally condemned to being sure of life eternal. What a fantastic gift He won for us! What a dazzling effect it had upon us!

Something else that is amazing. Here I have a glass of water. I usually keep water handy when I'm preaching. Now, if water had a smell, I'm sure it would smell like water. It tastes like water. It feels like water. We use water just like this everyday. We use it to wash and bathe with. Our bodies are made mostly of water. And, yet, it has no dramatic, fantastic, and dazzling effect in itself. Yet, what does our Lord promise about using what just like this in baptism? That in baptism what we receive is the dramatic, the fantastic, and dazzling.

Same is true with the bread and wine we use in the Holy Communion. That bread, very simple stuff, very little smell, little taste, and it certainly doesn't fill our bellies. And, how about the wine we use? Taste and smells like ordinary, simple wine.

Yet, what does our Lord promise us when both are used in His Supper? That we receive His body and blood, forgiveness, and our faith in Him is strengthened- and, that is something not so ordinary and simple, but dramatic, fantastic, and dazzling! Something so simple gives us something that comes bursting into our lives making us have to hang on to our hats.

Here is a question for us to ponder. Naaman desired something only God could give, to be cured from his dreaded disease. And, when he found God's way of doing that very thing he became upset. Did that stop God from giving Naaman what he needed? No. God knew all along Naaman would be upset in the way it was to be done. How about with Thomas? Jesus is God. Certainly, Jesus knew all along, even before Thomas did himself, what condition Thomas had on believing that Jesus was raised from the dead. Yet, did that stop Jesus from graciously approaching Thomas and giving him His Word that it was true. It wasn't that Thomas actually put his fingers in the marks in Jesus' hands, or felt Jesus' side that made him able to believe. What made it true for Thomas was Jesus' Word!

Friends, while we are here on this earth, which is a very short time, compared to eternity in Heaven, we will find, everyday, that we have needs. And, often we do put a condition on God meeting those needs by allowing ourselves to think of how, when, and where God should meet them. Yet, even though we do this, God forgives us, and still meets those needs. And, even yet, He does so in a way that is best for us! How do we know this? We have His Word that it's true.

The only condition for any of our needs being met is the condition Jesus met for us on the Cross of Calvary. We have His Word that this is true. Even then, the condition that we must trust this doesn't make what Jesus did for us on the Cross true or not. The faith, the trust, we have in Him that what He promises us is true, even that need of faith is something He gives us in full. All the needs we have from start to finish, God has covered all the angles.

Our prayers, our worship, our confessions, and God's answer and response to them all- they are all conditioned on one thing- His willingness! And, He is willing, He says so. What He says He has done, He's done. What He says He will still do yet, He will do.

Friends, such simple ways, God takes care of all our needs. Simple. Because of that truth we are able to look forward with happiness and tears of joy the dramatic, fantastic, and dazzling thing that's going to happen when our Lord returns! Amen.