October 12, 2025
St. John's Tappahannock
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Luke 17:11-19

Namaan and Elisha (2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c)

First, I would like to start with OT story which is one of my favorites. It says so much about human nature.

As the commander of the Syrian Army, Naaman had a celebrated reputation for his military victories, and the Syrian king valued him greatly. However Namaan had leprosy. Through the encouragement of his wife's Israelite servant girl, who suggested he visit the prophet Elisha of Samaria for healing, Naaman asked for the King's permission to travel to Israel for a cure.

The Syrian king did not hesitate to let Namaan go and sent a letter to the Israelite king asking for Namaan's healing.

The Israelite king thought at first the request was a trick to provoke a conflict. But Elisha the prophet had heard about Namaan's illness and sent for him. When Namaan arrived at Elisha's house, a servant met him and instructed him to go and wash seven times in the River Jordan. Naaman was angry and offended; he had expected the prophet to perform some elaborate rite or ceremony over him. He went off in a rage.

After Namaan's servants made him realize healing does not always happen in a grandiose way, he finally dipped himself in the water 7 times and was cured. In gratitude, Namaan went to Elisha, told him of his faith in God: "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel."

So this Biblical event has a few familiar elements. First, God often works through those who are simple and not the expected ones, in this case, Namaan's wife's Israeli servant girl who had been captured in a raid.

A commander of the Syrian Army would have had a big ego, and going to a country doctor at first was not good enough for him. But luckily his servants knew if he let his ego needs go for the moment, he had a chance to be healed.

He had a change of heart, and was healed in the river and here is the important half of the tale – he showed gratitude. He gave a Elisha a gift – not just the tangible item*, but of saying that he now was a believer in the God of Israel.*

At times we are in a situation where things are so complicated it seems there is no way out. But God always has the best solution. If we trust him in all things, we will be much less anxious and much the wiser. As Jesus assured us, 'Sufficient unto the day are the worries

thereof,'(Matthew 6:34), and, 'With God all things are possible.' (Matt. 19:26b)

Ten Lepers (Luke 17:11-19)

This famous event has what seems at first an uncomplicated message. Ten lepers are healed of their illness by Jesus after he commands them to go to the priests.

One turns back in deep gratitude, praising God for everyone to hear along the way. He bows down before Jesus and thanks him. Again we find this man is a Samaritan, an outsider, from a place which was thought to be made up only of people of unacceptable pagan religions. "Only the Samaritan leper sees and really understands what has happened. He sees not only that he was healed, but that he has found God's salvation. His return to Jesus amounts to his conversion," we read in the *Jerome Commentary* (p. 709). The same thing happened to the OT Namaan. They were both healed *and* converted. That the NT leper is Samaritan illustrates that God's salvation is for all people. In Him we will find not only healing, but the fullness of life.

It reminds me of when Jesus called the disciple Philip, and then Philip encouraged his friend Nathanael, to come with him to meet "Jesus of Nazareth, the one who was foretold by the prophets", and Nathanael said one of the most

ironic phrases in the whole NT – “What good could come from Nazareth!” Well he was about to find out.

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he says, “Behold, and Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.” Then with the sense that this man Jesus made him feel known and understood and welcomed, Nathanael said, “How do you know me?” and Jesus said, “When you were under the fig tree I saw you.” By seeing, Jesus meant he saw into Nathanael’s soul.

Then came Nathanael’s redeeming realization, “Rabbi you are the Son of God, the King of Israel”. Jesus responded, “Truly, truly I say to you, that was nothing, you will see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

The logical reaction to having received something you really appreciate is not only to be thankful, but to express that gratitude. These are two halves of a circle, and if the response of gratitude does not get expressed, the exchange of emotions does not feel complete. With Namaan the commander, the Samaritan leper and Nathanael the disciple, we see the complete beautiful cycle of gift of healing and well-being given, and the response of gratitude in a statement of faith.

Yet the fact is, we do not know where the other healed lepers went. Maybe when they went to show the priests

they were healed they stayed awhile and praised God! Or something equally wonderful!

Theologian and author Diana Butler Bass reminds us that:

"…ultimately, this story is about the generosity of God. The gift of healing is free. Christian theology calls that grace — a gift with no strings attached, a gift that comes from the nature of God, a gift of love. God is the Ever-Gifting One. Extravagantly, endlessly, without condition or expectation of response. All of creation is a gift; every day we are surrounded by gifts. The gifts never stop, are never taken back, not in any way contingent on the recipient. The gifts just are. Only sometimes do we notice. Only occasionally do we turn back, fall on our knees with gratitude, and say *thank you.* However, gratefulness isn't what heals us. At the end of the story, Jesus says it is faith…that makes us well.

In effect, gratitude is an expression of trust. Sometimes, we take gifts for granted because we trust that they will always come. But, sometimes, a gift is so enormous, so unexpected that we do notice. And that's when we turn around and fall on our knees in wonder to offer thanks, finally understanding that gracious gifts surround us every day and have always attended our way."**1**

Last Friday morning my mom at age 96 entered into eternal rest. The previous evening her 14th great

grandchild, Edith, was born. Mom had 5 children, 13 grandchildren and now 14 great grandchildren. How do we put into words the passing of a life, of a Mother so deeply loved and cherished – how do we carry the sadness. That a great grandchild was born into the family in the same 24 hour period was such a gift to all of us – a reminder of the beautiful cycle of life and death that is at the core of our earthly existence - our hearts burst at the wonder of it all.

We do not have to hold the sadness – we can turn, like the grateful Bible people we read about today, who turned toward the One who makes us whole, remind ourselves that death is the door to eternal life! So we cast off the shroud, and embrace the joy of the resurrection that turns everything around.

Thanks be to God.

Footnote

1. Diana Butler Bass – substack 10.12.25