

Learning to Trust
Luke 10:1-11 2Kings 5:1-14
July 7, 2019

Trust. This morning's reading from 2 Kings is all about trust. It is about learning how to trust and whom we can trust. Naaman is a man who has a lot of privilege within his society. He is a respected leader, a commander in the army with many successes to his credit. But when we listen in to his story today, Naaman was at risk of losing all of this and more because of a skin disease. Many ancient people, including the Arameans, insisted that their leaders be physically perfect. If anyone found out that Naaman had leprosy, his career would be over without question, but essentially his entire life would be over as well, or at least life as he knew it, because he would no longer be accepted in the social circles he and his wife frequented. A man in Naaman's position could not show even a small sign of being less than perfect or he would lose everything that he had worked so hard to achieve. A person like Naaman needed to be very careful about who he allowed to get close to him. He couldn't trust very many people, assuming that everyone he encountered was out to topple him from his position of privilege and power. Many of them would be happy to see him fall. He had to be careful and ensure that no one saw the inevitable flaws in his armor of perfection. If anyone caught wind of his current problem, he would most likely be run out of town, perhaps sent to a leper colony in some remote place far away from his family and former friends. He would lose absolutely everything. So Naaman is understandably upset about discovering the first signs of leprosy and wants to find a quick fix for it before anyone else gets wind of what is going on with him.

The Israelite slave girl who serves his wife hears about Naaman's condition and she speaks right up about Yahweh. She has immense trust in her God's ability to heal even the worst conditions. There isn't a shred of doubt in her mind that if Naaman would just go to Israel seeking healing, then he would be healed by Yahweh. *Since we are thinking about trust this morning, I want us to focus for a moment on this slave girl. We don't even know her name, which tells you something about the lack of respect she was afforded. She had been taken captive, and forcibly removed from her own home and country. She is the servant of Naaman's wife, in one of the lowest positions in the household, and yet she is willing to risk even this tenuous hold on a life that she has in order to help Naaman. She is willing to speak up because she has unshakable trust in Yahweh. When we let her example sink into our minds and hearts, it makes us aware of how powerful her faith is, and by contrast, how shaky our own faith and trust in God can be. If we were in a similar situation, would we have faith enough to take the risk that this slave girl was willing to take?*

When Naaman hears what the slave girl said, he grasps at this straw of hope, but he doesn't listen really well. Instead of seeking out the prophet of whom the slave girl spoke, he goes first to his own king to get a letter of introduction, and then to the king of Israel. You see, he is a man of power, used to dealing with other people in power. It never occurs to him to go looking for some obscure prophet. He isn't used to working that way. People in his position don't pay much attention to prophets or to the gods they serve. They have no trust in that quarter. Unfortunately, the king of Israel doesn't think to turn to his God or prophet either. He doesn't take Naaman nor his concern at face value, but assumes it is yet another provocation between warring kings.

Thankfully Elisha the prophet of Israel catches wind of the situation and takes matters into his own hands, directing the king to send Naaman to him.

This is where Naaman's own trust will be tested and eventually built. Elisha doesn't make it easy for Naaman, expecting him to take responsibility for himself as perhaps no one else has required of him for a very long time. *"Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean."* I can imagine what went through Naaman's mind at that point: *"Excuse me! Do you know who I am? What do you mean I need to be made clean, and that your cruddy river is going to do it for me?!"* After Elisha calmly closed his door in his face, Naaman raged to his servants at the indignity of it all. He thought Elisha would come and pray over him and heal him on the spot. He didn't want to go bathe in the Jordan. He wanted to be healed instantaneously. If any river was going to heal him, he considered that the rivers back home were far superior to the one here in Israel. But remember, this is a story about trust, it is about learning to trust in something larger than oneself, learning to trust in God. It is also a lesson in humility, and this is something that does not come easily to Naaman because he is so accustomed to having people do what he says and not the other way around. Putting himself in a position of vulnerability, first to a foreign king, then to a foreign prophet who serves a foreign God, was decidedly *not* on his agenda. It took awhile before he was willing to do what Elisha said. I can imagine the scene he created as he ranted and raged in anger and embarrassment on the dusty road outside Elisha's house. But finally, one of his servants got through to him, convincing him to give it a try: *"Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?"*

Finally, Naaman does it. He gives in despite his still simmering anger. He gives in despite his embarrassment at being told he was unclean. He gives in, quite possibly because there is absolutely nothing else he can do. Isn't it like this for us as well? Sometimes the first step in trusting God is simply to give up, to let go of the tight grip we have on control. Sometimes trusting God begins when we have run out of all other options, saying, "okay God, I give up. I can't do this anymore. I don't know how to fix this." When we finally get up the courage to do this, because it *does* take courage to let go and let God take over, the relief washes over us, just as the waters of the Jordan washed over Naaman. I love that the scripture says his flesh was restored *"like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean,"* because this is how it can feel when we are embraced by God's healing love and power. We feel young again, reborn and refreshed, and we begin to take baby steps toward trusting something outside of ourselves, toward trusting God. The healing Naaman received was not just physical. When we trust God, we too discover that the healing that comes to us is all-encompassing. We are made new in ways that we cannot even anticipate before it happens.

Healing God, we are so grateful that you offer to us a healing that goes beyond what we know to ask for, beyond what we understand. Please forgive us for not reaching out sooner when we are in pain. Help us to trust you more fully with our lives, the broken parts as well as the aspects that seem fine and good. Please heal what is hurting within us so that we might reach out and heal others. As Jesus sent his disciples, to offer healing to a broken people and a hurting world, send us as well. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.