



Lenten Reflection for Saturday, March 19th

Dana Taplin

You can listen to the reading and reflection by clicking [here](#).

2 Kings 5:1 - 15

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. And the king of Aram said, "Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel." He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy." When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me." But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel."

So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. But his servants approached and said to him, "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'?" So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

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."

This passage offers the hard evidence of divine intervention that doubting Thomas and many of us wish for. The

prophet Elisha has considerable abilities: In the preceding chapter Elisha gives a “great woman” the gift of conception and some years later restores her apparently dead son to life. In this passage Elisha tells the Aramean battle hero Naaman to dip seven times in the Jordan river to be recovered of his leprosy. After much grumbling Naaman does so and—sure as I live and breathe—his leprosy is no more! Later in the chapter Elisha metes out punishment to a servant who has falsely accepted royal gifts that Elisha had declined to receive. The dramatic events of this passage reveal typically human frailties— first on the part of the King of Israel, who furiously suspects treachery in this request from his Aramean counterpart. As if to say a mere king cannot be expected to work miraculous cures, and what case for war will the King of Aram make when I decline to help Naaman? Interceding in this royal pique, Elisha offers Naaman a suspiciously easy cure. But Naaman, puffed up from his triumphs in battle, assumed Elisha would come out and greet him properly, call on the name of the Lord, “...strike his hand over the place and recover the leper” in a glorious technicolor moment. And really—does he think the rivers around here have better water than our Aramean rivers? But his servants talk Naaman back from the brink; he submits to Elisha’s cure and, suffused with the evidence most of us can only hope for, realizes immediately that there are no gods but the God of Israel. This passage enacts a familiar internal dialogue of outrage moderated by reason, faith and charity. Perhaps the king regrets his hasty reaction to the Aramean king’s letter as he agrees to refer Naaman’s entourage to Elisha. Then, when Naaman’s level-headed servants offer their master a balanced perspective on Elisha’s message, we can imagine Naaman counseling himself “Oh, silly me--of course the Jordan river treatment is worth a shot.” I think the lesson in this passage is not that we should avoid our outrages and jealousies but that in God’s presence we can so readily recover our judgment and choose the right path.



Dana Taplin lives in Windsor Terrace with his wife Michele and son Aaron and commutes by e-bike to the Department of Environmental Protection in Lefrak City, Queens. Dana is thrilled that Saya offered him a chance to return to his choirboy roots by joining our choir earlier this year.